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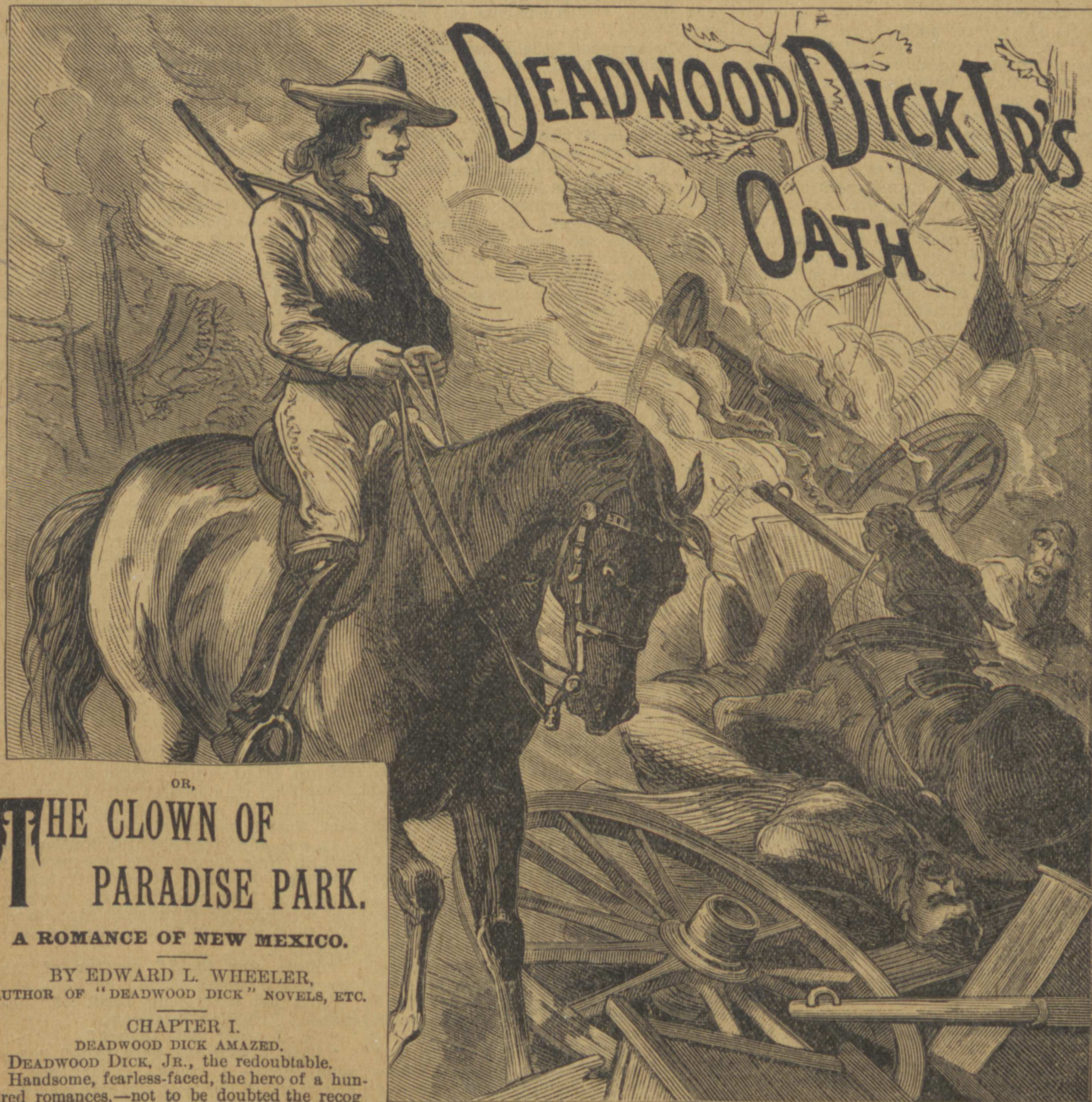
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OR, THE CLOWN OF PARADISE PARK.

A ROMANCE OF NEW MEXICO.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,
AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

DEADWOOD DICK AMAZED.

DEADWOOD DICK, JR., the redoubtable.
Handsome, fearless-faced, the hero of a hundred romances,—not to be doubted the recognition.

"I PROMISE IT—I SWEAR IT!" DEADWOOD DICK, JR., REPLIED.

Mounted upon a superb black, clad in rough-and-ready garb, with a rifle slung across his back, he was riding leisurely along through a narrow defile, alone, thoughtful.

Presently his horse lifted its head and sniffed the air, pointing its ears and proudly arching its neck, and Deadwood Dick roused out of his reverie.

"What is it, Eagle?" he asked, patting the animal's glossy neck.

The horse gave a low whinny in response.

Dick brought the horse to a stop, and looked and listened attentively for some minutes.

At first he neither saw nor heard anything out of the usual, but presently a faint scent of smoke reached his nostrils.

"Ha! That was it, eh, my beauty?" he said aloud. "Your sense of smell is keener than mine, Eagle. What can be burning, I wonder? Not the plain, at this season."

He started on again.

"No, it isn't the grass," he mused, as a stronger scent reached him; "it is more like a building, but I was not aware that there was a house within a score of miles of here. Step up, Eagle, and let's get out of this gully to where we can see something."

As if understanding what was said, the horse began at once a reaching lope, and Dick had his eyes well about him as they drew nearer and nearer to the plain, for the smell was growing more distinct all the time; and presently, as a bend was turned, a thin trail of smoke was observed afar off to the left, and Dick put his animal to greater speed.

Half a mile further on, and he came out upon the level tableland.

Looking at once in the direction of the source of the smoke, he found that it came from a clump of cottonwood some half a dozen miles distant.

For some minutes he stood motionless, shading his eyes with his hand and gazing in the direction of the fire, trying to make out what was burning; but that he was unable to determine.

While he stood thus a stronger whiff of the smoke reached him, and there was something terribly suggestive about the smell. Without waiting longer, he gave his horse the word, and was immediately dashing away in the direction of the fire.

It did not take a great while to cover the distance, and when he reached the spot a horrible sight met his astonished eyes.

Within the narrow limits of the cottonwoods, wagons and horses and human bodies were piled in one frightful funeral pyre, and the fire had more than half performed its work.

It was a picture of desolation, a scene of death. The simple story was plainly read: a wagon train, an encampment for the night, a surprise and attack, and a horrible massacre. But by whom and for what object—these were questions not so easily answered.

"My God!"

Deadwood Dick could not repress the exclamation.

He voiced the words aloud, and scarcely had they fallen from his lips than he heard a moan.

Was it possible that one had been left alive to tell the tale? He looked in the direction whence the moan had come, and as he looked he saw a man lift himself up on his elbows.

The lower half of the man's body was pinned to the ground by the weight of one of the wrecked wagons. The fire

was almost upon him where he lay, and the expression of his face was one never to be forgotten, once having been seen. He called for help.

This in a few brief moments, and Deadwood Dick was out of the saddle instantly.

Leaping over the bodies and carcasses that lay between, he seized hold upon the wheel that was holding this man to the ground, and, with almost herculean strength, hurled it over.

That done, he lifted the groaning man in his arms and bore him out of the reach of the fire and laid him down on the grass. It was plain that the man was dying and that the end was near. Dick pressed a flask to his lips and bathed his forehead.

The man had nearly fainted, but presently he recovered, and, lifting himself to one elbow, he looked searchingly at his deliverer.

"What has happened here, my man?" Dick asked. "Who has done this hellish work?"

"Who are you?" the dying man cried. "In heaven's name, tell me who you are."

"I am known as Deadwood Dick, Junior."

"Thank God! Thank God! You will avenge us—you must avenge us! I have heard of you, and I know that you will promise this dying request."

"Yes, yes, I promise you my man; but who are you, and who has done this thing? Waste no time, but tell me all you can. Was it whites or Indians—but, it is hardly necessary to ask that."

"You lay it to the Apaches, but you are wrong, wrong. They had nothing to do with it. My God! if we only could have known! Look well around you, Deadwood Dick; see the wreck, the lives, and then swear by all you hold sacred that you will wreak vengeance for us."

A frightful pallor came over the man's face, and his eyes lost their fire ere he had done.

"Yes, yes," Dick hurried, "I promise it—I swear it, my man. Your name, your name, before it is too late! It all depends upon the clew you can give me; I can do nothing without a clew—My God! his lips are sealed forever!"

The dying man had made one great effort, under spur of Dick's words, but his strength failed him and he fell back, mouth open and his eyes only half closed.

If he could have lived only a few minutes longer, if he had not wasted the brief moments that had been allowed him!

Deadwood Dick turned away with a heavy feeling at heart.

Somehow, he felt that here was a mystery that he would never be able to solve to the full.

He would follow the trail of the fiends who had wrought such havoc with property and life, however, for they could not be many hours distant, and he would at least avenge the massacre.

Going outside the circle formed by the wrecked wagons, he looked to learn which direction the miscreants had taken, and what was his sheer amaze, when, coming back to the point from which he had started, he had not found a single track leading from the scene of the crime!

He had expected to find the plain, bold trail of at least half a hundred horsemen, but he had found not one. Amazed beyond measure, he made the circle once more, only to be overcome with greater amazement on finishing it. Not a track was to be found leading from the spot,

and no trail of any kind save alone that which had been made by the wagon train on coming to that place.

For once Dick Bristol was utterly non-plussed.

What did it mean? How could he explain it? By whom had the horrible massacre been done, and how had they departed?

Again he made the circle of the camp scene, and again, and yet again; but all to no purpose. Not a track was to be found anywhere, and although he mounted his horse and widened the circuit, still was the result the same.

Completely mystified, Dick turned back to the clump of cottonwoods, to find that the fire had taken hold now upon fresh material and was burning furiously. A breeze was springing up, too, that fanned the flames, which were licking at one of the largest of the trees.

Dashing forward, Dick leaped to the ground, and in spite of the fervid heat, he succeeded in laying hold upon the body of the man whom he had saved in the first instance, and in carrying it out of the reach of the flames.

The others were doomed to burn, and he could not hope to save anything from the burning. He could only look on, puzzled.

It was a horrible sight, yet it fascinated him.

The mystery of it all chained him to the spot; he stood as if in a study, and it was not until the burning cottonwood came down with a crash that he roused to action.

The tree added new fuel to the flames, and Dick knew that it was useless for him to hope to discover anything in the way of a clew after the fire had died out. Everything would be gone, save the iron of the wagons and some charred bones. His only hope for a clew was by means of the body he had saved.

He examined it thoroughly. There was nothing in the pockets, and no identifying mark upon the garments. On the left arm, however, between elbow and shoulder, imprinted with India ink, were a scroll and the letters "A W" in red. And that was all he found; that was all that remained as a clew to the mystery. And these, of themselves, were insufficient for its solution. Who these people were, Deadwood Dick could not learn. The days, the weeks, the months,—aye, the years rolled by.

CHAPTER II.

THE LAPSE OF YEARS.—THE LISTENER.

"By the way, Deadwood Dick, did you ever solve the Cottonwood Meadows mystery?"

"Never, Colonel Nickerson. That is the one enigma on my slate that I have never been able to wipe off. I begin to think it will always remain there—in fact, time is the proof of it."

In one of the hotels at a leading resort in New Mexico, late one pleasant evening. A group of men, of whom Deadwood Dick was one, idly smoking and relating bits of personal experience; and Dick, needless to say, was the chief attraction.

"What was that?" another of the company inquired.

"Did you never hear about it?" demanded he called Nickerson.

"No, I never did, colonel."

"Then Bristol will have to tell it for your benefit, I guess. I dare say it marks one of the most thrilling episodes of his checkered life."

Dick was in the right mood and needed no urging, and told the story contained in our opening chapter. A good

talker, he thrilled his audience, and all gave him the closest attention to the end.

"But, the outcome of it?" one of his listeners urged.

"There has never yet been any," Dick responded. "At that point the veil was drawn."

"And you have never been able to lift it?"

"Never, to this time."

"Well, what is your theory?"

"I have none, sir."

"No theory?"

"Well, none that I have ever been able to substantiate, anyhow. Put yourselves in my place, gentlemen, and see if it would not have puzzled you."

"Yes; but you are a professional detective—"

"Nevertheless, it has so far baffled me. I can no more explain it than I can fly. I have tried, but all in vain. There they were, murdered, man and beast alike, and no indication that any one besides themselves had been near the spot."

The others shook their heads.

"Yes, Bristol came to the fort where I was stationed," said Colonel Nickerson, "and told his story, and I went in person with a company of men and found it just as he had described, except that the body he had saved from the fire was gone. That could not be found."

"But the back trail," another listener urged. "Why did you not follow the back trail?"

"Just what I did do," asserted Dick.

"And with what result?"

"The result that the mystery was only deepened by my following it. I traced the party to the point where the train had been made up, there to learn that it had been made up with the utmost secrecy and that no one knew anything whatever about it."

"And you could learn nothing?"

"Nothing."

"Well, well, that must be a sharp stone in your craw, Deadwood Dick, from all accounts of your successful exploits as a detective. Have you given the case up, then?"

"No, I have not given it up, gentlemen; but, without a clew, it seems to be tabled for a decidedly indefinite period."

"I move that we now take it up for consideration," suggested one of the party who had not before spoken.

The eyes of all the others turned upon him at once.

"What do you mean, sir?" inquired Deadwood Dick.

"I believe that I may be able to throw some light upon this matter—in fact, I feel certain that I can do so."

Needless to say, he had the attention of all. He was a man from the East, a boarder at the hotel, of middle age and quiet habits—the last person in the world from whom such a statement might have been looked for.

"Why, what can you possibly know about it, Mr. Williamson?" asked the colonel.

"You have heard me making inquiries at different times for one Andrew Whitley—"

"A name that agrees with the initials on my dead man's arm!"

Deadwood Dick so interrupted.

"Yes, and the mark you have mentioned also agrees with Andrew Whitley," the gentleman said further.

"A clew at last!"

"Yes, I have heard you making inquiries for such a person, Mr. Williamson," responded the colonel, finding opportunity to speak. "I believe that you can furnish the sequel."

"No, it will remain for Mr. Bristol to do that; I may be able to give him the prelude, but I can do no more. I am of the opinion that Providence has brought us together that I might hear the story that has just been told."

"Not unlikely, sir," averred Dick Bristol. "I believe that I have more than once been an instrument in the hands of Providence, sir."

"But your part of the story," urged Colonel Nickerson.

"It is short and soon told, colonel. I am a friend of the Whitley family, and on my leaving home, for this trip, Ryan Whitley asked me to make inquiries concerning his brother Andrew, who came West several years ago and was last heard of here, in New Mexico. I promised that I would do so, and have kept that promise; but, as it was believed that Andy was long since dead, it was hardly thought that anything would come of the inquiries."

"When was he last heard from?" asked Deadwood Dick.

"Six or seven years ago, I should say, sir. So long ago that Ryan had even forgotten the name of the place from which the letter—"

"Beg pardon, sah," one of the colored waiters of the hotel at that moment interrupted, approaching in haste with a letter, "but heah am a letter that is marked very important, sah."

"From the very man we are talking about, I believe!" Mr. Williamson cried, excitedly. "Your pardon, gentlemen," eagerly tearing open the missive. "Yes, yes, so it is; and—Ha! what is this? Give me your attention, gentlemen, and I will read it aloud."

He had what he asked for immediately, and read as follows:

"Dear Mr. Williamson:

"I have just received a letter from Andy, and written in haste to inform you. It is dated five years ago, and the envelope is yellow with age, it has been so long in reaching me. He said he had been prospecting there in New Mexico, and had just made a royal find. He wanted me to sell out the farm and come and join him. I am suspicious, now, that he met with foul play, and I wish you would look into it for me. If you can get any information concerning a noted detective called Deadwood Dick, put me in communication with him immediately. The thought that Andy had died so far away from home was bad enough, but to think that he met with foul play is worse. If I get proof of it, and there is any chance for vengeance, I'll spend my last dollar and devote my life to the work, besides. I write this in haste, and hope to hear from you without delay. I know you will be interested.

"Sincerely yours,

"RYAN WHITLEY."

"What did you think of that?" Mr. Williamson demanded.

"The hand of Providence is certainly in it," answered Deadwood Dick. "Give me Mr. Whitley's address."

"Here, take the letter, sir. I will drop him a line and tell him that he may expect to hear from you shortly—Better still, I will telegraph immediately, for he is anxious."

"Who would have thought it would turn out like this?" observed Colonel Nickerson.

"That what would have turned out thus?"

"My asking Mr. Bristol about the Cottonwood Meadows mystery. Verily, you impress me with the belief that Providence does take a hand in the game once in a while."

"I have many times had proof of it, colonel."

"And what is the clew you now have to work upon in this instance? Come, let's hear the sum and substance of it, for you can well believe that my curiosity is as great as yours can be, Bristol. I am eager to see the mystery solved, now that it comes up again."

"Well, colonel, it seems a plain case, far as it goes. Andrew Whitley was here about the time of the Cottonwood Meadows massacre, and he had a mark on his arm similar to the one on the arm of the man whose life I tried to save. There is every reason to believe that that man was Andrew Whitley. The fact that he was going secretly to develop a mine he had discovered, is sufficient for the supposition that the massacre may have been for the purpose of stealing his mine away from him. I may be wrong in this; it remains to be seen."

"And you will not fail to let me know the outcome? But, needless to ask that question. If the Cottonwood Meadows affair is to be cleared up, after all this lapse of time, and you can do it, it will be one of the tallest feathers you ever put in your cap, Mr. Bristol, and that is saying a good deal."

"I believe that I shall now be able to accomplish the task," asserted Dick, confidently. "If you will excuse me, gentlemen, I will write an answer to this letter immediately."

"And I will go and telegraph at once," added Williamson, rising.

So their party broke up.

"So, it is coming out, at this late day, is it?" muttered a man who had been sitting near them, half buried in a newspaper. "And this fellow is Deadwood Dick, eh? Well, let him come on; he will meet his doom, that is all. He will find that he has bitten off more than he can chew, for once in his life, as the saying is."

This man remained for some time longer, still deeply interested in his paper, apparently. Finally, choosing a time when he would be least likely to be observed closely, he rose and passed out, and no one had taken particular note of him.

Once outside he hastened away in the darkness, and when safe from observation he stopped and shook his fist at the hotel, muttering again:

"Yes, let him come on, curse him!"

CHAPTER III.

THE TRAGEDY AT PARADISE.

Paradise was rudely awakened.

Doughy Baker was pounding on the mayor's cabin door, shouting at the top of his voice.

The hour was early, about the time when the camp usually began to stir, and men who were already up ran out from their cabins to learn what was the matter, for it was plainly something unusual.

They all ran in the direction of the mayor's cabin, and about the time they came up the mayor opened the door and came forth in haste, one boot on and the other in his hand, and his suspenders dangling behind. He had not stopped to don either coat or hat.

"What is the matter?" he loudly demanded. "What is that you say about a murder?"

"It is Mr. Hamilton—he has been murdered in his cabin," the boy made answer. "I went up there to call him, at the usual time, and found the door on a crack and him murdered in his bed."

"Dave Hamilton murdered!" exclaimed the mayor. "You must be dreaming, Dougherty."

The boy's name was Dougherty Baker, called "Doughy" for short.

"No, I ain't dreamin'," the boy declared; and, indeed, the scared expression of his face supported his story. "He has had a knife jammed clean through him, and he is stone dead."

A howl for vengeance went up immediately from the score or so who had collected before the mayor's cabin, for David Hamilton had been one of the most popular men of the camp; and a rush was made straightway in the direction of his cabin. But the mayor called on them to stop.

"Hold on, you galoots!" he shouted. "Don't go trampling all over the ground like a lot of cattle. It has been raining, and if there are any tracks we ought to be able to follow them. Act with some sense, and know what you are doing. If murder has been done, as this lad tells us, we will want to get hold of a clew if possible to find one."

"Ther mayor is right, boys," cried one bearded miner, stopping short and holding up his hands for the others to do the same. "We mustn't sp'il ther chances of findin' ther right man by any fool work. Let's keep cool and let Mayor Eastwood take ther lead. Come, Pete, put on yer boot and git yer hat, and let's git up thar quicker'n soon. If Dave Hamilton has been murdered, somebody has got ter pay fer et!"

"That's what they has!" raged the crowd, which was growing larger every moment. "Thar will be a hangin' hyer in Paradise before the sun is an hour high, if we kin git holt of ther cuss what done et!"

The mayor pulled on his boot, and rushing into the cabin for his hat, immediately led the way in the direction of Hamilton's cabin.

Meantime the boy had given all the particulars to a group who had gathered around him.

Hamilton had made an arrangement with the lad, whereby Doughy went up to his cabin every morning at a certain hour to awaken him and fetch a pail of water, and perform any other chores that might be required.

He had gone up as usual on this occasion, but had found the door slightly open, as stated, and Mr. Hamilton dead in his bunk, having been killed with a knife. He had not stopped to note anything more than the one terrible fact, but had made all haste to apprise the mayor.

The crowd, led by the mayor, was not long in reaching the scene of the crime, and a sharp lookout for tracks had been kept as they approached.

It was not until they came near to the cabin, however, that tracks were found, save those of Doughy Baker—to which no attention had been paid; but as they came near another set of tracks was discovered.

"Ha!" cried the mayor, "look here!"

He pointed to the ground, and, sure enough, there were other tracks leading straight to the cabin door from down the slope.

"A pair of fine boots!" exclaimed one man.

"And not very big feet, either," another added. "Who was ther galoot?"

"That remains to be ascertained," said the mayor. "Do you find any tracks leading away from the cabin, boys?"

A hasty search was made, the men taking care not to obliterate anything with their own tracks, and after a moment a shout went up that they had found other boot-marks.

It was the same track, now leading in

the direction of the trail that went down to the stage road, which lay a couple of miles distant down the gulch.

Paradise was not on a main trail.

"That is what we wanted," the mayor cried. "It will be easy to follow, and we will have the cuss before he can give us the slip. But let's see if the report is true before we go any further."

He pushed open the door of the cabin and entered, the others crowding close behind him and peering over one another's shoulders to get a better view, and the sight that met their gaze was one to strike awe to a stout heart. There, on his bunk, lay David Hamilton, dead, stricken down in the prime of life.

For a moment no one spoke.

"The man who has done this thing shall perish, I swear it!" the mayor suddenly cried out. "Come! We must be after him before he can make good his escape."

The crowd shouted approval. Turning and leaving the cabin, the mayor closing the door, and stationing a couple of men there to guard the cabin, with orders to admit no one, he led the others in the direction of the trail, following the tracks. The men behind him were grim-visaged and determined.

CHAPTER IV.

CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE.

Paradise, in Horsetail Gulch, was a rude, rough settlement.

It was at this time four or five years old, but it had never grown beyond a certain limited population.

There were two reasons for this; first, it was in a place not easily accessible, and second, there was not room in the narrow gulch for much of a town.

A population of about two hundred souls, all told, it was a peculiar place in that not a woman was to be found in the gulch. It was a standing joke that this was the reason the camp was called Paradise. Be that as it might, the fact remained.

The chief man of the camp was Peter Eastwood. He was sole owner of the Good Luck Mine, mayor of the camp, and monarch-of-all-he-surveyed generally. His claim was broad, comprising nearly the whole of the gulch bottom at that point, and most of the miners were his tenants, living in cabins of Eastwood's building and ownership.

Those who had cabins of their own had been obliged to build up on the gulch slope beyond Eastwood's line, for he had ever steadfastly refused to part with a single inch of his possession. His cabins, even at reasonable rental, were a fine source of revenue for him, and as he owned the only store in the gulch, he had everything pretty much his own way. More than half the men of the camp owed their allegiance to him in one way or another.

Hence there was, perhaps, a third reason why the camp had reached a certain point and then come to a standstill.

Not that Eastwood was tyrannical, for he was not; on the contrary, he was popular and well liked. He was a close man, wanting every cent that was due him, and always claiming it; and yet he was liberal withal, where it stood him in hand to be so.

David Hamilton, the now murdered man, had filled the office of superintendent of the Good Luck for a year, and had been, as we have said, one of the most popular men in the camp. He was about five years younger than Eastwood, and, had the question been put to vote, without fear or favor, he would probably have outranked the mayor in point of popularity.

No wonder, then, that the rage of the people was great against the cowardly miscreant who had taken his life.

The men talked among themselves in bitter undertones as they hastened along the trail, close upon the mayor's heels, and regret was expressed that they had not thought to bring a rope with them.

The mayor was for the most part silent, save now and then when he spoke approval of some threat made against the murderer, if caught, and kept his eyes fixed steadfastly upon the tracks they were following as they descended the winding trail that led to the stage-road.

"Ther cuss has sartain not tried to hide his tracks," one man observed, as they hurried along.

"I opine that he thinks to get clean away before the discovery is made," was the mayor's response. "But we will have him, Gil Rogers, as sure as my name is Pete Eastwood!"

"Unless ther stage was sure on time, and he intended goin' by et," spoke yet another. "But, even so, we're bound to have him. Have ye yet s'picioned who et can 'a' been, mayor?"

"Yes, I have," the mayor grimly answered. "I may be wrong, of course, but—"

"Who d'ye s'pect?" was the excited interruption.

"I prefer not to say; I may be entirely wrong. But these tracks don't prove that I am. No matter, we'll find out all in good time, for we're bound to have him."

So they pressed on, talking one to another in sullen half-whispers, and at last they came out upon the stage road. There they found where the man had been standing for some time, till at length, tired of waiting, as it indicated, he had walked leisurely in the direction from which the stage would come.

The stage had not yet gone.

"We have got him, now," said the mayor, grimly. "Come on, and keep as still as you can."

They filed on, three to six abreast, these thirty and odd denizens of Paradise, till presently, turning a bend in the road, they came suddenly upon their man.

"Duplex John!" exclaimed he called Gil Rogers.

"Just what I thought," asserted the mayor.

"But he never done et; that I'll swear to," declared Rogers, confidently.

"He will have to prove that," rejoined the mayor. "I think the proof is all the other way."

They had found their man sitting upon the stem of a fallen tree, and he had merely looked up at first, but, seeing their dark and scowling looks, had leaped to his feet.

"Good morning, mayor and citizens of Paradise," he greeted them. "What is the meaning of this? Is it an exodus?" And he smiled in his usual manner, a smile that had become familiar to most of them during his brief sojourn among them at Paradise.

He was a handsome fellow, straight as an arrow and perfect as an Apollo. He had a pair of keen, magnetic dark eyes, a dark, graceful mustache, and a wealth of hair rested in a mass upon his shoulders. He was roughly clad, as befitted the time and place, but that he was no rough miner his face and hands bore ample testimony. He looked the sport.

Seeing immediately that something was amiss, the smile left his face and a look of inquiry succeeded it.

"You will soon find what the meaning of it is, young man," the mayor

cried out. "Throw up your hands, or by Harry, I'll bore ye through where ye stand. I am in dead earnest."

This was evidently more than the man had looked for, for it seemed to take him by surprise. He had no chance to defend himself, even if he would have offered resistance, so he made the best of the situation and surrendered, and in the same moment a dozen hands seized him.

"Well, what does it mean?" he coolly asked. "This is quite a surprise, I assure you, gentlemen."

"Do you admit these as your tracks?" the mayor demanded, pointing.

"Certainly," was the response.

"Then you are our prisoner. Bind him, men, and search him. He may have something about his person that will settle it."

"I don't believe it," declared Gil Rogers. "This man ain't ther kind ter do a thing like that, nohow. What have ye got ter say about et, John Dixon; why don't ye speak up in yer 'fense?"

"How can I do that, till I learn what the charge is?" asked the prisoner, with an air of utmost innocence.

"Ha! ha!" the mayor sneered. "That is pretty well played, Duplex John, as you have styled yourself—though goodness only knows what your real name is; but it won't serve the purpose this time."

"Ther charge is murder, that's what et is," cried out Gil Rogers, "but I say, and I stick to it, that you never done et!"

"Murder! Who has been murdered?"

"Ha! What d'ye call this?"

"Dave Hamilton's watch, as I live!"

"What say you now?" demanded the mayor.

The action of it all had been rapid. The prisoner had already been bound, willing hands were searching his pockets, and a gold watch was brought to light at the moment he demanded to know who had been murdered.

"Yes, it is David Hamilton's watch—I admit it, certainly," he said, with all coolness. "He is sending it up to Apache to have a spring put in it. But who has been murdered, I demand, and why have you pitched onto me for it? I am all in the dark."

"Ha! ha!" was the mayor's hard laugh. "Sending his watch to have a spring put in, and him a-laying stone dead in his cabin—"

"My God! You don't mean to say Hamilton is dead—that he has been murdered?"

The prisoner's face blanched, and his exclamation was like a cry.

"Yes, we do, and we believe that you are the murderer," responded the mayor, grimly. "Haven't I said before, boys, that I had my suspicions of this fellow?" he appealed to the crowd.

There was a howl of assent immediately.

"All ther same, I hold him innocent," declared Gil Rogers, determinedly, his own face pale. "Guilty men don't act like he has acted from ther first, Pete Eastwood. Ef he had killed Dave Hamilton, he wouldn't 'a' left so plain a trail ter show which way he had come."

Before more could be said the rattle of wheels was heard and the stage came lumbering along to the scene and stopped.

CHAPTER V.

TWO AGAINST MANY.

"Whoap!" sang out the Jehu, as he brought his six "critters" to a stand. "Consarn ye fur a lot ov fool mules, anyhow! What is ther matter hyer, boys? What has that feller been a-doin'?"

"Matter enough, Hawkins," responded the mayor of Paradise. "He has done a murder, that's what's the matter, and we are going to string him up higher than Haman. You don't happen to have a rope aboard your hearse there, do you? If you have, hand it out."

"Whew! ther doose yer say! No, I ain't got no rope aboard, and ef I had one I'm blamed ef you would git et, Pete Eastwood, fer that feller don't look like a murderer, he don't. Have ye got ther proof hard on him?"

"No, he ain't no murderer, nuther!" cried Rogers. "I say and I stick to, that he is innocent of ther charge. He ain't had no show yet."

"Who says that man is a murderer?"

A new voice, and a man leaped out from the stage and confronted the men of Paradise.

The foregoing had taken but a few brief moments, after the stage came to a stop, and this man made his appearance as promptly as circumstances would admit of.

He was a sharp-eyed fellow, mayhap thirty-five years of age. He wore a rough business suit that fitted him well, and looked to be a man accustomed to brushing up against the world. He had a sandy mustache, and there was just the suggestion of an Irish accent in his speech.

"I say that he is a murderer," responded the mayor of Paradise, promptly. "His tracks have led us straight from the place where the body of his victim was found, and it stands to reason that he must be. The body wasn't cold yet, and this fellow has had just about time enough to get down here. He was no doubt going to light out."

"I have told you for what reason I came down here," said the prisoner, in a calm tone.

"He came here to meet me, undoubtedly," said the stranger. "My name is Phil Parson, and I am his pard. I am on hand as you expected, Dixon. What do you say to this 'charge'?"

"I say that I am innocent, of course. I did not know that Hamilton was dead until so informed by these men. He was alive and all right when I went to his cabin to get his watch, and so I left him when I came away. I know nothing about it whatever."

"A clever story, a very clever story," sneered the mayor, "but how are you going to prove it?"

"I'll undertake to do that, if given the chance," said the prisoner.

"And you shall have the chance," declared the new-comer. "How many among you, men, are in favor of giving the prisoner a fair trial, with ample time in which to prove his innocence?"

"Count on me fer one," called out Gil Rogers, promptly.

"And me fer another, ef I could stay hyer," supported the Jehu. "I don't believe he done et."

For the most part the rest were silent, looking to the mayor to speak for them, apparently.

The mayor's face darkened.

"No one can be more in favor of fair play than I am," he asserted. "This man shall have a fair trial, but it is so plain a case that it looks like foolishness—"

"If you are in favor of law and order in your camp, sir," interrupted the new-comer, "there is only one honorable course open for you, and that is to see that my friend has the fairest kind of a trial, and every chance possible to prove himself innocent."

"That is what I am kickin' fer," cried Gil Rogers.

"Yes, that is the right way," chipped in the driver. "A fair and square show fer his money, every time."

He was gathering up his "ribbons" to go on. Late already, it was impossible for him to linger long by the wayside, unless absolutely necessary, for he had a railroad connection to make.

"Do you think that I would be in favor of lynching an innocent man?" asked the mayor.

"I should hope not, Pete," said the driver.

"That is all we can ask, then," accepted the new-comer. "Give my friend a fair chance, and I think he will prove his innocence to your satisfaction."

"Nobody kin kick at that," the Jehu approved, tightening his grip on the lines and flourishing his whip. "You'll find that ye have got ther wrong man, is my opine, boys. G'lang, there! ye lunkhead brutes!"

There were other passengers aboard the stage, but not one of them had opened his mouth to say a word.

The stage went clanking on its way, the driver casting a look behind as he turned the bend, and until it had passed out of sight no one in the crowd said anything.

The prisoner was the first to speak.

"Well, mayor," he said, "I am in your hands, and I have only one favor to ask at present."

"What is that?" the mayor snarled.

"That you take me back to the camp and let me have a look at Hamilton's body and the cabin. There may be some clew to the rascal who killed him, for, I assure you again, that I am not the man."

"We'll take you back there, rest assured on that point," was the crusty response. "And you shall have a trial, too; but as far as your being innocent, I don't take any stock in that myself. You have told a clever story, I admit, but I have had my suspicions of you before to-day."

"That's so," some of the crowd supported.

"It is certain that I told you no lie when I said I had to come down to the stage this morning to meet a pard," the prisoner argued.

"You never told me anything of the kind, young man."

"I made no secret of it. I mentioned it in the Jolly Polly last night, and Mr. Hamilton for one knew of it, as did others who stood around."

"Maybe so. Who stood around?"

"You were not far away yourself, mayor, and some others, I did not particularly notice who they were."

"I suppose not. I certainly did not hear you say anything of the kind, and unless you can find some one who did, your story will not pass. Hamilton cannot testify for you, that is certain."

"You saw us leave the Jolly Polly together, didn't you?"

"Yes, I saw that."

"Well, outside he asked me to step up and get his watch this morning and bring it down to the driver, as I told you; and I did so. He was then alive and well, and so I left him. I know nothing further than that, as I have said."

"And I am here as proof that my friend expected a pard to come by this stage," spoke up the arrival. "Let us return to your camp, and, as he says, there may be some clew to the rascal who has done the deed. I cannot believe that you want to hang him before you are fully satisfied that he is the guilty man."

"To the camp with him!" ordered the mayor, sullenly. "I am for fair play,

but heaven help him if we have to decide that he is the man who did it."

"And heaven help the man who did do it," said the prisoner.

They set forward up the trail that led to the camp, and the prisoner was so well guarded that it was impossible for him to think of escape.

The new arrival, who had given his name as Phil Parson, walked alongside of Gil Rogers, who had not been backward about expressing his belief in the innocence of the prisoner, and they talked as they walked.

The mayor, leading the way, talked with those near him, and it could be seen by his face and the faces of those around him that they believed they had the right man in their hands and that they were determined that he should not escape them.

Thus they labored slowly up the trail to the camp.

Meanwhile the camp was all astir, the news was known to everybody, and many of the denizens were met on the way.

These latter swelled the crowd, and by the time the camp was reached there was a good half of the population in the party, and those who had just come out from the camp seemed most eager for a lynching.

Phil Parsons and Gil Rogers, having evidently come to an understanding, put themselves close to the prisoner, and the expression of their faces was of grim determination to see that he had fair play, even if it cost them their lives; and particularly was this true of Phil Parson.

CHAPTER VI.

FACING THE STORM.

It was a peculiar situation.

We have shown from the first that the man called "Duplex John" was, presumably, innocent of the crime.

His story concerning the watch was in every particular true, and it did not look reasonable that he would have murdered the man, no matter how great a villain at heart, and then left so plain a trail.

When the mayor and those with him appeared in sight of the camp, as they climbed up the slope, a great shout went up, and the other half of the population ran forward, flourishing no less than half a dozen ropes. The cry was for an immediate lynching.

Phil Parson and Gil Rogers hastened to put themselves in the van.

"Ye have got ter stop that, Mr. Eastwood," said Rogers. "You have promised a fair trial, and ye want to tell 'em so."

"You attend to your own business, will you?" the mayor savagely snarled, turning upon the man. "It seems to me that you are taking a good deal upon yourself in regard to this fellow."

"So I am, and so I mean ter, too."

"We rely upon your word, sir," urged Phil Parson. "Somebody will have to say something to that mob."

The peril was imminent; the crowd was almost at hand; their shouts and threats were loud and vengeful, and it was plain that something would have to be done quickly.

"And it had better not be you, let me warn you," advised the mayor. "You are a stranger here, and if you let it out that you are this man's pard, at a time like this, I will not be responsible for the consequences. You had better keep in the background."

"I want to know if you are going to stop this mob," cried Phil. "If you are not—"

"You will do it for me, eh? Ha! ha!"

There was not another moment to waste. The crowd was at hand, and those with the ropes were making straight for the prisoner.

"Halt!"

So cried Parson, leaping out and facing them with a brace of guns to the fore.

"That's what's ther matter," supported Gil Rogers, putting himself alongside the new-comer, with an ancient Colt in his grip. "Let's stop and chat awhile before we do any hanging."

They stopped, needless to say.

Coming at speed, they checked themselves and fell back upon one another in momentary confusion.

"What ther blazes do ye mean?" cried the foremost of them all, a great lanky fellow with red whiskers, who was known as Hot-head Smith. "And who ther blazes are ye, anyhow?"

"I mean business, straight," was the fearless return. "As to who I am, I am this man's pard, and there is going to be no hanging until he has had a fair trial; you can make up your mind to that. Advance another step, and you will hear something drop!"

The man's face was pale, but his eyes flashed dangerously.

"And I am hyer to second ther moshun, b'gosh!" cried out Gil Rogers. "Et is my opine that we have got ther wrong man, Smith, and I ain't one ter take any hand in a hangin' onless I am purty sure that it is all right and straight and regular; that is the kind of a man Gil Rogers is, and nobody knows et better'n you, b'gosh!"

"What about et, mayor?" Hot-head Smith demanded.

"I have promised the fellow a fair trial," was the response. "I would have told you so, but this youngster took the game in his own hands and thought he would play mayor of Paradise himself—"

"I defended my friend, as I will do again, if occasion requires, sir," the stranger fired.

"And made a show of yourself."

"It was necessary."

"Not at all. A word from me would have stopped it all, when it was time to speak. But, stand aside; you are a tenderfoot, that is plain enough. We have got the man, boys, and a trial is in order."

"What's ther use of a trial?" cried Hot-head Smith. "Ef it is as I hear, that his tracks led straight from ther cabin, don't et stand to reason that he is ther man what done et? What more proof is wanted 'n that? What is ther use of our wastin' time?"

"He says he is innocent."

"That be blame! Don't we know better'n that?"

"Mayor, you have promised a fair trial, let that settle et," reminded Gil Rogers.

"Mebby you aire in ther mud, too," cried Hot-head, turning upon the one man of them all who had dared to voice a word in the prisoner's defense. "Mebby you hadn't better be too promiscuous round hyer, so ter say, about this time, or you might git into a tangle yerself."

"I'm takin' my chances of that," Rogers defied.

"And we ain't goin' to stand no foolishness," cried Hot-head. "Thar is Dave Hamilton, ther whitest man that ever struck Paradise, a-layin' dead up thar in his cabin, and hyer we stand a parleyin' and not takin' our 'venge. Is that the white thing ter do, men ov Paradise?"

"No! No!"

So howled the crowd.

"On course et ain't, and I fer one move—"

"If you move one step this way you are a dead man," warned the new-comer.

He brought his brace of guns to bear upon Hot-head's breast, and held him neatly covered.

For the moment he held the joker, so to say, and Hot-head Smith was not fool enough to rush to certain death, so he pulled in his horns as gracefully as might be.

"I was goin' to say," he bellowed, "that I fer one am in favor ov havin' this hyer trial jest as prompt as lightnin', and then dealin' with ther prisoner accordin'."

"That is ther talk! Ther trial!"

So howled the crowd.

"And a fair one," reminded Parson.

"You have promised that, mayor, and you look like a man of your word. I am only one against the crowd, but nevertheless a pard is a pard, and I mean to stand up for my friend as long as you leave me a leg to stand on."

"And thar's two of us," chimed in Gil Rogers.

"Yes, a fair trial, Smith," said the mayor. "We must not let our indignation run away with our horse sense. Paradise is a place noted for its fair play, and we will uphold our good name. Lead on, and prepare a court for Judge Lynch."

The crowd, easily swayed, shouted approval, and away they hustled in the direction of the Jolly Polly saloon, which marked the centre of the camp.

It was a respite, but nothing more—as the prisoner and his two friends recognized.

Phil Parson looked as if he would like to speak to the prisoner, but there was no chance for his doing so, save aloud, so that all might hear. They exchanged a look, and Parson spoke in a whisper to Rogers.

"What can we do?" he asked.

"Heaven only knows," was the response.

"I fear they will hang him, with only a mockery of a trial."

"That they sartain will, onless we kin turn ther tide the other way," was the rejoinder.

"And how can we do that? God help us in this emergency!"

"Durn me ef I rightly see," said the old plainsman—for Gil Rogers was a man well along in years.

"How many can we count on to stand by us?"

"Not a single one, I'm afraid."

"Well, if I cannot save him, I can at any rate die for him and with him," was the grim determination the younger man expressed.

"And you kin count on me to ther last pinch," declared the old plainsman. "I am for fair play, every day in ther week, and I mean ter see et here ef I have ter die fer et!"

By this time the foremost ones of the crowd had reached the Jolly Polly, and were carrying out tables and chairs for the purpose of erecting a temporary outdoor tribune for the occasion. The tables were being placed together in a square, and the chairs on top of them, and by the time the prisoner reached the spot all was in readiness.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MOST LIVELY ON RECORD.

The structure was a shaky one, but it was substantial enough for all purposes.

The tables supported one another, and although they swayed slightly when the mayor mounted to the top, they were not likely to do more than that.

Having taken his place, the mayor motioned for those with the prisoner to follow, and the additional weight seemed to make the temporary platform all the more secure.

Phil Parson followed his pard.

"What are you doing here, sir?" the mayor demanded, turning upon him.

"It is my intention to look after the interests of my friend in this trial, sir," was the response.

"You appear as his lawyer, then?"

"Yes."

"Well, I s'pose that is all reg'lar, though we are not used to such trimmings out this way. We generally hear whatever is to be said, and then let the public decide on the merits of the case."

"In this instance I want everything done according to law, since we are not outside the pale of the law even here," said Parson. "There must be a jury of twelve, who will decide whether this man is to be held on the charge or not, and who will have power to acquit him or commit him to jail for—"

"He! ha! haw!" broke out Hot-head Smith. "That wull be a fine thing, now won't et? I don't 'bjeck to ther jury, but ther verdick has got ter be final, you bet. We don't put ther public to no expense, in cases of this hyer kind, my young tenderfoot friend."

"That is sound doctrine," agreed the mayor. "You can have your jury, my friend, but the case will be settled here and now, one way or the other."

"Well, the man who cannot have all he wants would be a fool not to take what he can get."

"That is logic, too."

It was noticeable that the prisoner had very little to say, but his keen, dark eyes flashed ominously.

"How is the jury to be chosen?" asked Parson.

"In any way that's fair," said the mayor. "I have promised a fair trial, and your friend shall have it."

"Well, suppose you choose one and I one, till we have the required number. Of course, it will be useless for you to name this fellow," indicating Hot-head, "and it will be useless for me to select Mr. Rogers here."

There was a little parley, while they were adjusting that point, but finally they came to an understanding and the selections were made, the mayor calling out names in an apparently off-hand manner and the other picking out one here and another there as their faces impressed him.

In a few minutes the twelve had been selected, and were seated in a row in front of the platform.

The judge then declared the court ready.

Meanwhile, somebody had suggested that if the prisoner had a lawyer the camp ought to have one as well, and Hot-head Smith took it upon himself to fill that office.

He announced his intention to the mayor, and was accepted promptly enough and told to take his place on the platform. This Mr. Hot-head did, and when the mayor—or judge—declared the court duly opened for business, he launched out for the prosecution.

"Feller galoots," he began, "a murder has been done hyer in our midst, and we aire hyer fur the purpose of decidin' whether or not ther prisoner at ther bar is ther skunk what done et. That is what we aire hyer fur, as I said, and that is what we mean ter detarmin'. Let me give ye ther facts ov ther case, and then ye kin figger et out to suit yer-selves."

"Doughy Baker goes ter ther cabin ov Dave Hamilton, to call him up, at ther usual hour. He finds him dead in bed, knifed through and through. He gives ther alarm. Our mayor and some of our citerzens rush up thar, and what do they find? Tracks, made by a fine boot, leadin' down to ther stage road. They foller, and what do they find? This hyer galoot, ther prisoner at ther bar, waitin' fur ther stage. They search him, and what do they find? Dave Hamilton's watch! What more is needed 'n that, feller galoots?"

There was a wild cheer, more like the howling of a horde of wild hyenas, and Mr. Hot-head sat down.

"Lynch him!" some one shouted.

"String him right up!" yelled another.

"We don't need ter hear t'other feller, now!"

They were on the point of making a rush, but Phil Parson was on his feet, shouting and motioning, and gradually the uproar subsided and they listened to hear what defense he could offer.

"Men of Paradise," he said, "there can be no fairness about this trial unless both sides are heard. We admit everything that has been stated by the other side, save alone the fact that the prisoner killed Mr. Hamilton. That he did not do. Some one entered the cabin after he had left, for he left Mr. Hamilton alive and well. Unfortunately, he has only his bare word for this; but, on the other hand, who saw him do the deed? What motive had he to kill the man? Would he have left so plain a trail, he having done it? Does not your sense of fair play lead you to see that the circumstances against him is no proof."

"Now, what we propose is this: You may hold him prisoner if you will, but give me the assurance that you will do nothing rash, and give me ample time to look into the case further and furnish the proofs, if such are to be found. If you hold to your present intention and hang him, and I can show to you later that you have hanged an innocent man, what good will that do my friend? This must not be done; you are too fair-minded to allow it to be done; you will take both sides into consideration, and decide accordingly. Gentlemen of the jury, I have no long argument to present; I have no proofs in hand to exhibit; but I ask you to acquit my friend on the ground that the charge has not been proven."

There was little more that could have been said.

"Haw! haw! haw!" laughed Hot-head Smith, when his opponent had done. "Ef that ain't ther weakest I ever heard in all my born days, I'll drink water straight! What more do we want, galoots ov Paradise?"

"Order!" cried the mayor.

"Your'n to command!" said Hot-head, bowing and stepping aside.

"Gentlemen of the jury," said the mayor—or judge, "you have heard the matter ably presented by both sides. I will not add anything that may confuse your judgment. Take the case, and let us have your verdict."

The crowd cheered.

The jury put their heads together for a minute, while a deathlike silence fell.

Their consultation was brief. The foreman rose in his place, and doffing his hat in an awkward way, delivered the verdict.

"Wull," he said, "we hev come to a 'clusion, and it is to ther 'fect that Dave Hamilton was foully murdered by some ornery cuss, and that this hyer galoot is ther man."

"Ka-whoop!" yelled Hot-head Smith. "What did I tell yer? Didn't I say he done

et? Fetch along ther ropes, boys, and we'll mighty soon carry out ther sentence, I opine! We'll see ef strangers kin come to this hyer camp and murder us at pleasure!"

There was a mighty roar, and the crowd surged forward.

But something else had taken place by this time. Gil Rogers had slipped away unobserved, and he now appeared mounted.

Straight into the crowd he dashed, regardless of everything, and he was leading another horse besides his own. The crowd made way for him, to save their necks, and he made straight for the tables.

There was instant confusion, and, acting quickly, Phil Parson cut the bonds that held his friend's wrists and slipped a revolver into his hand. Quicker than it can be read, then, Duplex John was on his feet, and a strange call, or signal, fell from his lips.

The result was surprising.

There was a loud whinny, and his horse broke away from Rogers and came dashing to the place where his master stood!

By this time revolvers began to bark, here and there, but the confusion was so great that the bullets flew wide, and in the scramble made by those most eager to get out of range, the tables were overturned.

Duplex John's horse did not stop for anything, but came straight on to its master, and seizing hold of it the moment it came near, the recent prisoner swung himself into the saddle, and was off like the wind. Phil Parson tried to follow him, on Gil Rogers' horse, which was tendered to him, but before he could mount he was seized and a rope was around his neck in a trice.

CHAPTER VIII.

EXCITEMENT AT WHITE HEAT.

It was a time of confusion.

The rage of the citizens of Paradise scarce knew bounds.

Their first prisoner having escaped them, all their hatred was poured out upon the second.

"To ther tree with him!" yelled Hot-head Smith. "Mebby he had a hand in et anyhow, we don't know; it was mebbly a skeem between 'em!"

"He deserves death anyhow, for interfering with the workings of justice," averred the mayor. "Drag him on, boys, for if we spare him we might as well give up trying to have order here."

"That's what's the matter! Fetch him along! Ka-whoop!"

"'Venge fer Dave Hamilton!"

So, half carrying and half dragging him, they made for the nearest tree, no less than a dozen men having hold upon the rope.

Everybody was crazy with excitement; no one paid any attention to anything but the immediate business in hand; the escaped prisoner was forgotten and no thought was given to Gil Rogers.

They were only a minute or even less in reaching the tree, and the rope was thrown over the nearest limb.

Useless to resist; it was one against the many.

"Up with him!"

No sooner the cry than the prisoner was jerked high up in air.

But there was disappointment for them even then. The whistle of a bullet was heard; the rope snapped, and Phil Parson dropped to the ground unharmed, save for the shock of the fall.

His hands had not been bound, and he had grasped the rope above his head as soon as released by his captors.

The bullet had been fired by Gil Rogers.

Before there was time for any of them to recover from this surprise, another was upon them.

There was a wild yell, the thud of hoofs, and into the circle dashed Duplex John, on his coal black, and he stopped directly under the tree and faced the howling mob.

He was between the crowd and his pard.

It looked like certain death for both, now, as it would surely have been certain death for the one without the intervention of the other at the critical moment.

Duplex John, as we have heard him called, was now armed with a pair of revolvers, and these he presented at the crowd, while his ringing voice called them to heed what he had to say. For the instant he held the better hand, but he could not hope to keep it.

"Stand!" he shouted. "The first man to make a move dies! You have had your inning, and it is now my turn."

"At him!" roared Hot-head Smith, who was not directly in the front.

"Hear what I have to say to you first," cried the fearless horseman. "I am innocent of the crime of which you have accused me, and my pard is beyond suspicion entirely. He was not even here at the time of the crime."

"But he was on hand mighty soon after it was done."

"You know how he came here. Now, the question is, do you mean to murder us here in cold blood, or will you give us a chance to prove what I assert?"

"You have been tried and found guilty, sir," reminded the mayor. "Twelve men have found a verdict against you, and there was nothing left for us to do but carry out the law."

"The law—ha! ha! Mayor, to my mind the law is a stranger to you here, or at any rate justice is. Now, here is a proposition I am going to make to you, if you will allow me to say a few words before you begin your attack. Give me a chance, and I will find for you the man who killed Dave Hamilton."

"Give you a chance ter git away, you mean," shouted Hot-head.

"What kind of a chance do you want?" the mayor demanded.

Duplex John was only talking to gain time. His horse was whinnying, and the other animal was drawing near unnoticed.

"Let me and my pard go free, give us the freedom of the camp, and in less than a week I promise you that I will clear up this mystery and deliver the murderer over to justice."

"You promise too much, my man," said the mayor, sneeringly.

"Then you refuse it?"

"I feel assured that you are the man who did the deed, and what is the use of further parley about it?"

Just then the other horse trotted up, and Phil Parson seized it and made a leap into the saddle. And no sooner done than he, too, turned and faced the crowd.

He had found a couple of guns ready for his use in the saddle pockets, the butts in plain sight.

"I can see there is no use of further parley, sir," said Duplex John, in rejoinder to Eastwood. "I will give you just one minute to get out of range of my gun."

"Wh—what do you mean?"

"I mean business, nothing more and certainly nothing less. You are wasting valuable moments."

"You do not mean to shoot—"

"As surely as the morning sun is shin-

ing. My life was nothing to you; I hold yours as nothing to me. Men of Paradise, draw back, or your mayor dies in his tracks."

The mayor, pale to the lips, moved back, the keen eyes of the sport fixed upon him and his revolvers aimed straight at his breast.

There was muttering, but the whole crowd acted as one man.

"Make haste!" was the order. "You know whether I can shoot or not; you know why I am called Duplex John—because I am as handy with one hand as with the other; I am giving you a fair chance. Fall back, every mother's son of you. Get a move on you!"

Bang! Zip!

A shot, and a bullet within six inches of the sport's head, fired by a man a little distance behind the mayor and in the thick of the crowd.

John Dixon did not flinch, so far as could be observed, but instantly one of his weapons spoke, and the fellow who had fired that shot threw up his hands and dropped, a bullet in his brain.

"Who is the next?" the sport cried. "Try it if you want to, Hot-head; I notice that you are itching to do it."

If so, Mr. Hot-head did not give way to the temptation.

The crowd fell back with haste, after that exhibition of marksmanship.

In less than one minute there was a wide space between the two mounted men and the angry mob, although every man in that throng was armed and the two could have been riddled, could they have acted in concert.

Such is the power of the "drop."

"Further than that!" Duplex John called out. "Your mayor is within too easy range yet. Further than that!"

The muttering was increased to a low rumble, and it was plain that the storm must soon break. It was a single chance in ten thousand whether the two intrepid pards would escape with their lives or not.

The crowd continued to fall back, acting with their mayor, who felt himself to be the target of a man who never missed.

But the rumble was becoming a roar.

During this time, Phil Parson had said nothing, but had held his weapons presented. He was looking with admiration upon his friend.

"Had we not better run for it?" he now whispered.

"The range is short," said the other. "They will riddle us the moment we turn."

"We'll have to take the chances, won't we. The flood is going to leap the barrier in a moment, anyhow, by the sound of things. What do you say? I am ready for the word."

"No; it is certain death to try it. We must back away and steal all the ground we can before we make the break."

They began backing at once.

At that moment came another shot, not quite so close as the other, and again did Duplex John fire with lightning quickness.

His bullet went unerring to its mark, for this time the man who had fired the shot stood out in plain sight, and could hardly have been missed by such a marksman, in spite of the distance.

This had the effect to throw the crowd into momentary confusion again, and in another minute Duplex John and his pard wheeled and dashed away at top speed. Soon a shower of bullets was sent after them, but they were out of range, and they disappeared, leaving the denizens of Paradise howling with rage.

CHAPTER IX.

CHAGRIN AND DISCOVERY.

"A thousand curses!" roared Hot-head Smith.

"They are going to escape us!" cried the mayor. "Who ever saw such nerve as that?"

"Tell me they ain't guilty!" bellowed Hot-head. "They are both guilty, and we wur fools fer not hangin' 'em when we had 'em in our hands in the first place."

"By Heavens! they shall not escape us! David Hamilton shall be avenged! Get your horses, a dozen of you, and arm yourselves well, and we will run them down! Would they have acted thus, if not guilty?"

"No!" roared the crowd.

"Then get your horses," the mayor repeated. "We must not allow them to get away."

"Not if it costs us every drop of blood in our bodies!" yelled Hot-head. "Dave Hamilton was my friend, he was a white man through and through, and will ther citerzens ov Paradise 'low him to go un'venged?"

"Never!" screamed the frenzied mob.

They were already off for their horses, with never a thought of breakfast in their eagerness.

It was still early morning, all that we have recorded had taken place with rapid action, and by this time the whole gulch was in a state of wildest commotion.

And if frenzied before, what was the condition of the untamed denizens of Horsetail Gulch when a new and startling discovery was made? They went raving distracted, if that be a stronger term, and especially was this true of Hot-head Smith.

Nearly every horse in the camp had been hamstrung!

"Ten thousand curses upon ther cuss what done et!" shrieked Hot-head. "I will cut out his heart, if I git hands upon him! Oh! ther pizen varmint!"

He ran around and around, tearing at his hair and beard, and it looked as if he was going out of his mind, or had already taken leave of his senses. He howled like a mad hyena.

Nor were the others much behind.

"And my horse, too!" bewailed the mayor. "The best horse in this camp, by long stalk! Oh! if we could only get hold of them again. But neither of them did this business, Hot-head; who can it have been? They must have had still another man with them—"

"No, no! It was Gil Rogers, that's who et was!"

"Yes, it must have been!"

"Death to Gil Rogers!" howled the crowd. "We'll burn him at ther stake, if we kin find him!"

"A thousand dollars to the man who can find and bring him here!" the mayor loudly proclaimed. "If he did this thing, we'll skin him alive! We will hang him, anyhow!"

"Yas, fer et was him that helped ther murderers to git away!"

"And mebbly he had a hand in et himself!"

"Whar's Gil Rogers?"

That was the question—where was he?

The old plainsman was searched for, but he was not to be found.

His absence was taken for proof that it had been he who had crippled the horses of the camp.

It seemed like a cruel thing—it was a cruel thing, but as compared with the saving of two human lives it became as nothing—not, however, to the minds of the denizens of Paradise.

There was no help for the horses; they had to be shot and put out of their mis-

ery. And when that had been done the camp began to cool off gradually.

Never in its history had it experienced such a time as this.

The forenoon was running on before they bethought them that they had not yet breakfasted, and that was the next thing in order.

Perhaps a visit to the Jolly Polly, and more than one in some cases, had been in order even before that, but of that we need not speak; let it be taken for granted.

When next seen, Mayor Eastwood had recovered his equilibrium.

On coming forth from his cabin he fell in with Hot-head Smith, who likewise was in nearer a normal state of mind.

"What is ter be done about Dave?" Hot-head asked.

"Just what I am thinking about," responded Eastwood. "He must be buried, of course."

"Sartain sure. In all ther 'citement et clean slipped out ov my mind what et was all about, almost. Not jest that, but all thought ov ther body was clean lost."

"And the fellows I left there will want their breakfast."

"Wull, I should say so."

They walked in the direction of Hamilton's cabin, where the watchers were still on duty and where a crowd of men had assembled.

These were men who had liked Hamilton in life, and who respected him in death, and they were about the best class, taken as a whole, that the camp could exhibit. They were glad to greet the mayor.

"We have been waiting for you, Pete," said one, a man named Job Turner.

"And here I am, Job."

"Your men would not open the cabin till you came, and as we thought it all right, we simply waited."

"It was all right, because that was their orders, Job; but, had you sent word to me that you wanted too get in, I would have told them to admit you. Why didn't you send?"

"Because we knew you would come up here as soon as you had your breakfast, if not before."

"Well, we'll go in now."

The door was opened and they entered, to find everything as before described.

It will be remembered that they had not taken time, in the first instance, to make any examination, but had set off in haste to capture the murderer.

The window was now thrown open as well as the door, in order to obtain all the light possible, and the interior of the cabin was closely scrutinized. Nothing out of usual was noted.

That is to say, save alone the murder.

It looked as if the blow had been struck with a cool hand and with most deliberate intent.

Its deadly work had been instantly accomplished, as the mayor pointed out, as if the assassin had known the most vital point in the human body and had reached it unfaillingly.

The wound was bared, and closely examined.

By it the kind and size of knife with which the deed had been done could be accurately interpreted.

"Et was a swag-back bowie, that's ther kind ov a tool et was," declared Hot-head Smith, decisively.

"And that fellow Dixon had just such a knife as that," asserted the mayor.

"That's just what he had," some one else chimed.

"Oh! he done et, no mistake."

"We have not thought to search his cabin yet," suggested the mayor.

"You aire right!" cried Hot-head. "Come erlong and let's do et now! Not that we aire likely to find anything thar, but still we may git somethin' that will prove et on him harder still."

"Yes, it must be done," said the mayor. "Turner, we will leave you in charge here, to prepare poor Hamilton for burial. You were a good friend of his, and you have ideas regarding the fitness of things better than mine. I do not give up the thought of retaking that murderer."

Job Turner gladly accepted the duty, and the mayor and Hot-head and nearly all the others hastened off in the direction of the cabin that had been occupied by John Dixon during his stay at Paradise.

The cabin was one that belonged to Eastwood, and had been rented by Dixon for the time of his sojourn.

It was found unlocked.

At first, nothing was noticed that claimed their attention. There was the bunk, just as Duplex John had left it, but none of his effects were to be seen.

He had come to the camp without anything in the way of baggage, however, so it had been little trouble for him to pull up stakes and move out. He had evidently taken all that he had brought with him.

A close examination, however, revealed something rolled up and forced down between the side of the rude bunk and the wall of the cabin, and when it was drawn forth and unfolded something fell to the floor with a decided metallic sound, and there was seen a huge bowie stained with blood!

CHAPTER X.

NEWCOMERS TO PARADISE.

"Ther knife!" cried Hot-head Smith.

"Was I not right in my estimate of that fellow?" demanded the mayor.

The others, who had crowded into the cabin, looked with staring eyes, their mouths agape at the disclosure.

"You sized him up, ther first day he was hyer, that's a fact," declared Hot-head. "But who would 'a' thought that he would 'a' turned out as bad as this? Nobody would 'a' thought et."

"When a man is bad, he is bad clean through and through," opined the mayor.

"I believe et, b'gosh!"

The thing in which the knife had been rolled proved to be a pair of old overalls, which were recognized as having belonged to the last occupant of the cabin prior to the coming of Dixon, a fellow who had died suddenly of pneumonia some time ago.

"What more proof could be asked for?" demanded the mayor. "It is too bad that we did not riddle the fellow with bullets at sight, when we caught him."

"That's what would 'a' happened to him, too, if et hadn't been too good fer him," declared Hot-head.

"But he shall not escape, I swear it!"

The mayor spoke vehemently. He evidently thoroughly meant what he said.

"Is ther knife his'n?" asked one of the men who had crowded into the cabin. "Ef et is, that seems ter put ther dead wood on him."

"Et is one that belonged to Honset; don't yer recognize et?" answered and demanded Hot-head, mentioning the name of the last occupant of the cabin. "He found et hyer and used et."

"A thousand dollars to the man who will bring him back here, dead or alive, spot cash," the mayor announced. "Carry the news as lively as you can, boys, and let it be known all over the camp. Paradise must not have such a blot as this upon her history."

"You aire right!" echoed Hot-head. "Et's a cryin' disgrace ter this hyer camp that they got off like they did."

The things discovered were taken to the Jolly Polly, where they were put on exhibition, and there the mayor proclaimed again his offer of reward. More than that, he dispatched messengers in various directions with descriptions of the men wanted, with orders to announce the offer far and wide.

Later on, Eastwood returned to Hamilton's cabin.

Turner and those assisting him had performed their office, and the murdered man was ready for interment.

"Well, Job," Eastwood inquired, "any further discoveries?"

"Yes," was the prompt answer, "there is; I know that Hamilton had a pocket-book, and it is gone."

"Ha! is that so? Strange that we did not find it on the prisoner, for he was searched. We found the watch, you know. Then that was the motive for the murder, plain enough."

"It wasn't so much the money he had," continued Turner, "as some papers he carried in that pocket-book. He showed them to me one day, and said they would make him rich one of these days. He didn't let me read 'em, but I know they must have been of value."

"Not a doubt of it. We are coming at it slowly, Job, and we may be able to run the rascals down eventually, even if they succeed in giving us the slip for a time."

"Pete Eastwood, do you know what I have made up my mind to do?"

"No, Job, I don't."

"Well, I will tell you: I have made up my mind to run down the man that killed Dave Hamilton, if health permits."

"Ha! good for you. I hope you can do it, Job."

"Not that I can hope to do it alone, mind you, but I think I know of a man who can, if I can only find him."

"Who is that?"

"A chap they call Deadwood Dick. Ever hear of him?"

"Yes seems to me I have heard the name before."

"Well, I don't know where he is, but I am going to inquire, and if I can get hold of him, I will spend all my little savings if that will induce him to take the case."

"A good idea, Job. Wouldn't it be a good thing if the camp sent for him and put up a good round sum for the solution of the mystery? Not that there is much of a mystery about it, for it is plain enough who did the crime; but to hunt those fellows down."

"I don't know of a better plan, mayor."

"We'll do it. You find out where he is, and we'll send for him at once. Send out your inquiry by the very next stage."

"I'll do it."

So the matter rested, and early in the afternoon the funeral of Hamilton was held.

There had been no thought of work in the camp that day, and the funeral was largely attended—in fact, it was attended by the entire population of the gulch.

There was no "parson" at Paradise, but the mayor took it upon himself to make a few remarks at the grave, remarks that met with much approval. And so was laid to rest one of the acknowledged "whitest" men who had ever struck that camp, no man excepted.

The afternoon stage down from Apache brought passengers for Paradise.

They were only two, and they were put out at the nearest point to the camp, from where the mail-bag carrier piloted them into town.

One of these was a gentleman in rusty black, who wore goggles and lacked two front teeth—the latter strikingly noticeable owing to the fact that his upper lip was short and he wore no mustache.

His companion was a Chinese, clad in the orthodox fashion, who walked with a trot, carrying his master's baggage—for it was self-evident that he was the other's servant. He was as yellow as saffron, his head was shaven, and the tip of a queue stuck out from under his hat behind.

Now, there lived at this camp of Paradise a man whom, in the rapid action of our story, we have heretofore found no time to introduce. In fact, it was not necessary that he should be introduced before the time when he would be called on to play his part. He was a silly fellow, whose name was understood to have been Kyler Kyle at some time or other in the past, but who was now commonly known as "Ky-Ky."

A man of uncertain years, he was peculiar in more ways than one. That he was daft was not to be questioned for a moment, and yet at times he would sit for hours in one position, as if he were the most profound of philosophers, trying to penetrate the unknowable. More than once he had been seen to leap suddenly to his feet out of one of these brown studies, with a cry upon his lips, as if a burst of intelligence had come to him; but it would be only a momentary flash, for the light would go out again instantly, and he would remain "Ky-Ky," the fool.

On this day of which we write he had been sitting for a long time on a bowlder a little distance out of the camp along the foot trail that led down to the stage road. The mail-bag carrier had noticed him there on his way down to meet the stage, and when he returned, with the mentioned new arrivals in tow, the camp idiot was still in the same position.

The carrier had spoken to him on going down, but Ky-Ky had not so much as glanced up. There he sat, his long beard—which, by the way, was his pride—almost touching the ground, motionless and staring. As the carrier approached on his return, however, the man sprang suddenly to his feet.

The trio were almost upon him, and the fellow uttered a cry that caused the man of rusty black and his Chinese servant to stop short with a start of surprise, and thus for a moment they stood staring at the fool and he at them.

But it was only for a moment, and Ky-Ky wheeled and ran in the direction of the camp, screaming at the top of his voice.

"Wull, I'm blamed!" ejaculated the carrier.

"Who was that?" asked the man in rusty black.

The carrier explained, briefly, and added:

"But I never seen him take off like that before. It must have been that you skart him, I reckon, stranger."

"Impossible. My appearance would not frighten a cat, for I am the meekest of men—Moses himself wasn't any meeker. No, his mania must have run suddenly away with him, I take it."

"Somethin' is makin' him run, that is sartain."

It was peculiar, to say the least, for Ky-Ky was still running and was still screaming as he ran.

Straight to the Jolly Polly he was seen to go and to enter, and the denizens on the street turned to look after him. The mail-bag carrier hastened forward, filled with interest, and those whom he was conducting kept pace with him.

CHAPTER XI.

THE GREAT EGYPTIAN HEALER.

The Jolly Polly was owned by Peter Eastwood, needless to say.

It was the saloon par-excellence of the gulch, the favorite place of resort, and the nearest approach to a hotel the camp afforded.

The mayor's headquarters was there, likewise the post-office, and about this time of day the saloon was always well filled. On this occasion, all the camp being idle, a great crowd was present.

Eastwood was talking with Job Turner, Hot-head Smith, and some others, concerning the man whom they had sent for by the mail that had recently gone out, when into the room dashed Ky-Ky, still yelling, almost breathless, and his eyes wild with a strange light.

Everybody looked at him in surprise, naturally, and the mayor leaped to his feet, his face suddenly pale.

Ky-Ky opened his mouth as if to announce something, but in the same moment the curtain seemed to fall—as it were, the light went out of his eyes, and he was the same as he had been before.

"Thunder!" ejaculated the mayor, recovering quickly from his momentary shock. "I did not know but what we were to witness another tragedy. I did not know but there was a murderer at the fellow's heels ready to cleave him in two, the way he came yelling."

Ky-Ky, still panting, was looking foolishly around.

"What was the matter with you, Ky-Ky?" the mayor demanded.

The fool of the camp only stared, without making any attempt at replying. He never talked, so it was useless to ask him the question.

"He'll never tell you," said Hot-head Smith. "It was one of his fool spells workin' off, that was all. But them spells git worse, don't ye think so, mayor? And they come oftener, too."

"Yes, you are right," the mayor answered, absently.

"Hillo! what ther mischief have we hyer?"

So cried Hot-head.

The exclamation was caused by the entrance of the carrier, with the queer pair of newcomers at his heels.

The mayor glanced up, as did everybody else, for matter of that, and the public curiosity was roused to the highest pitch immediately.

"A preacher!" cried one.

"A fakir!" another.

"And a heathen Chinese ter boot!"

"Yes, we'll boot him, you kin bet we wull!"

"No, not ef he will washee-washee; we need one hyer mighty bad."

These and as many more remarks in a brief moment while the new arrivals were advancing into the room.

The man in rusty black stopped, and the Chinese directly behind him dropped his handbags to the floor, standing like a statue waiting to take them up again.

"Ahem!" said the man in rusty black, clearing his throat for action. "Is this a hotel, gentlemen?"

"Well, it is about the nearest thing in that line you will find in this town," answered the mayor. "What can we do for you, sir?"

"First of all, I want to bespeak lodging for myself and my body servant here, for one week at least. We may remain longer, if your camp is in need of my service."

"What is your business?" asked Eastwood.

"I am a doctor, sir. Behold!"

The man in rusty black thrust his hand into an inside pocket of his coat and

drew forth a handbill in large type, which he unfolded and held up so that all might read it.

It was worded thus:

"DR. HUXLEY PETTIBONE,
The Renowned Egyptian Specialist,

"Healer of all the Ills to which Human Flesh is Heir, now making his Grand Tour of the Western World, will stop at this place for a short time only. Patients examined free of charge. No cure no pay. Office hours from noon to midnight. Come to me, all ye that suffer. You state your case, and I will do the rest. Come."

"A doctor, eh?" sneered Eastwood. "Something of a quack, I suppose."

"Sirrah!" straightening up with dignity and placing his hand on his breast. "You insult not only me, but the noble profession."

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" the mayor demanded, laughing.

"Nothing, sir, nothing! We have to expect such things. Have you read my poster through? Do you not see that I am backing up my ability? If I do not cure I expect no pay."

"Well, don't take it seriously, sir," placated the mayor. "I spoke only in a jest. My landlord there at the bar will attend to your wants. We have no rooms in this building, as you must have observed, it being only one story high; but we have some cabins scattered around."

"That will suit me exactly. Are the cabins furnished?"

"One of them is."

"Excellent! My servant, Chop Wong, can keep it in order for me, and I can devote the whole time to my business."

The landlord of the Jolly Polly, who also figured as post-master, had by this time distributed the scanty mail and was ready to attend to other business. All the crowd had stood gaping at the stranger.

"Jipsum, attend to this gentleman," said Eastwood, authoritatively.

"Yes, sir."

"Give him the cabin that murderer had, it is all in order."

"Murderer!" gasped the man in rusty black.

"Yes. He is gone, though, so you need have no dread on that score."

"But, the bare thought of it! Have you no other cabin that is furnished?"

"Not another one, sir."

"Bless me, but it is terrible! I suppose I will have to endure it, though. I am no believer in ghosts, but it is not pleasant to sleep in a bed that recently held a murderer."

"You will get used to it."

"You spoke of it as a recent event; I suppose you hanged the wretch as he deserved?"

"On the contrary, sir, he got away from us. See that reward I have posted there on the wall? The murderer's ghost will not give you any trouble, for he has not yet given it up."

"Ah!" with a sigh of relief. "Nevertheless, it will be a horrible situation, till I get used to it. Do you understand it all, Chop Wong?"

"Yep, me allee samee savvy," the Chinese chipped.

"And you are not afraid?"

"Naw, me no flaid."

"That is the main point, then. Landlord, we will take that cabin."

"All right, sir."

"What is your price?"

"Five dollars for a week, without meals."

"A little high, but here is your money," handing over a bill. "And now, if you

will be so good as to point out the place—"

"I will show you the way," spoke up Eastwood.

He started toward the door, the man in rusty black following, and the body servant stooped to pick up the two grips he had charge of, when there was a loud and startling cry.

It came from Ky-Ky again, and he stared at the man in rusty black for an instant, a gleam of intelligence in his eyes.

Only for a moment, however, and the light died out as usual.

"What is the matter with the man?" inquired the doctor.

"Don't mind him," said the mayor. "He is loony, that is all. He is perfectly harmless."

"A lunatic, eh? A good subject for hypnotic experiment, perhaps. Would you believe that I have restored shattered reason more than once, sir? It is a fact; I have."

"You would find it a hard thing to accomplish in this case."

"It might be easier than you think. You have no idea what advances we men of science and medical lore are making, sir. It is perfectly astounding. I believe I will make the acquaintance of that poor fellow, and see if something can't be done for him."

"See here, sir," said the mayor, turning and facing him, they having passed out from the saloon: "I am mayor of this camp; my word here is law. I forbid your having anything to do with that fool. Do you understand me, sir?"

"Why, certainly; I would not do it against your wishes, sir, of course not. I was not aware that you could have any objection, sir."

"Well, I have. I will not have any such experimenting."

CHAPTER XII.

HOT-HEAD SEES A POINT.

They proceeded to the cabin so recently occupied by Duplex John.

On the way the mayor gave the particulars of the murder that had been committed, and no further mention was made of Kyler Kyle.

The Chinese servant followed close behind his master, carrying the two big grips and trotting along in a comical manner in his thick-soled shoes. His baggy trousers and loose blouse were a size too big for him.

Dr. Pettibone expressed himself as well pleased with the cabin, and took possession, and after a little commonplace talk the mayor left him.

The mayor returned to the Jolly Polly.

Hot-head Smith was there, and when the mayor entered Hot-head called him to one side.

"Do ye think everything is straight and reg'lar, mayor?" he inquired.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that seedy-lookin' doctor and his Chinees."

"I do not see anything wrong with them, Hot-head. That is to say, no more than that I think the doctor is a quack."

"If he ain't any more'n that, it won't matter."

"What do you mean?"

"I suppose it is onpossible that he kin be ther man we least want ter see 'round hyer?"

"Ha! ha! Why, Hot-head, have you taken leave of your senses? Of course it is impossible. What ever put such a notion as that into your head? You are losing your grit."

"Not a bit I ain't, but you know ther man we have got to deal with, and we have got ter have both eyes open."

"And our mouths closed," said the mayor.

"Yes, true enough, and you won't find mine open much ov ther time. What I am sayin' now I am sayin' to you in private."

"Then you suspect—"

"I don't suspect nothin'; I only asked you ef thar is room ter suspect anything?"

"No, there is not. You can rest easy on that. However, if you are not easy, call on them and satisfy yourself. You can make believe that you have got some ailment or other."

"I think I'll do et. But thar is another thing."

"What is that?"

"Ky-Ky."

"What about him?"

"D'ye notice how much oftener he is gittin' his spells?"

"Yes, I have noticed that, and something has got to be done with the fellow, that is certain."

"And did ye notice that ther sight ov ther doctor seemed ter make him take on wuss'n ever?"

"Yes, I noticed that, but do not attach any importance to it."

"Why don't ye?"

"Didn't it go to prove that he is getting worse instead of better? At any rate, I hope he is; we have got to watch him. There was nothing about this doctor to set him off."

"Wull, I have mentioned et all to ye, and no harm done. I'll go up and give ther doctor a call, as soon as he opens fer business."

"Yes, there can be no harm in that."

"Do ye think Duplex John will be found, mayor?"

"I hardly expect that he will. He will put distance between himself and this camp about as lively as he can, my opinion."

"And the other feller?"

"The same."

"D'ye know what I thought, mayor?"

"No, what?"

"I thought that mebbly that feller, Duplex, was Deadwood Dick."

"You did?"

"I did, fer sure."

"What put that idea into your head?"

"Wull, see ther nerve he had, and see the dead shot he was with his gun."

"All true enough; but, on the other hand, see the foul murder the fellow did here. You could not lay that to Deadwood Dick."

"Then you really believe he done et, mayor?"

"Why, you lunkhead, how can I think otherwise about it?" the mayor demanded, irately.

The mayor looked the rough fellow squarely in the eyes, and Hot-head seemed inclined to avoid the gaze.

"Wull, I wasn't sure of et," he said.

"You were not sure of it?"

"No."

"What are you hinting at? Come, you had better speak right out, I give you warning."

"That is what I allus have done, mayor. That's what I done now, ain't et? I thought ther feller was Deadwood Dick, and I thought mebbly you was willin' ter let him be s'pected."

"Not at all. He did the deed, no doubt about it."

"Then, 'cording to what ye told me, we have still got ter look out fer Deadwood Dick?"

"Well, yes—that is to say, I suppose so."

"Mayor, what is ther use ov yer beatin' about ther bush with me?"

"Curse you, what are you driving at? Speak out, now, and no more of your insinuation!"

"Wull, let's look at a sartain feature of ther case, ef ye please. Dave Hamilton war found dead in his cabin, murdered to ther bone—so ter say."

"Yes."

"And thar wuz ther tracks ov that feller, leadin' straight up from his cabin to Hamilton's, and then straight down to ther stage road, without ther least 'tempt at hidin' 'em."

"Yes."

"So fur so good, then. Now, Gil Rogers wuz right when he p'inted out that no man in his senses would kill another and then leave such a plain trail as that fer others to foller. That is one reason why I don't believe Duplex John done ther job."

"One reason why you don't believe it! What, then, is the other?"

"Wull, et is this: Ther knife what ther murder was done with was found in Duplex John's cabin, wrapped in a pair ov old overalls that had belonged to Honset—same as ther knife had belonged to him, and ther tracks ov Duplex John was plain proof that he hadn't gone back thar."

The mayor was looking at the man with eyes dilated, by this time.

"Hot-head, I never thought of that," he declared. "Why didn't you mention it before?"

"Fer ther reason I have said, that I thought you knowed et well enough but wanted to put ther feler out ov ther way—"

"You hound! Do you imagine that I would have hanged an innocent man if I knew it? You had better have a care how you speak to me. You might as well say I would murder."

"No, not at all, mayor. But, ye see, I s'pected et was Deadwood Dick, and I thought that you had ther same view ov ther matter, and I knowed that you wouldn't stop short at anything ter put him out ov yer way, and that wuz ther hull of et. I have told ye."

"Have you heard any one else mention this?"

"Mention what?"

"This proof that Duplex John did not do the deed."

"No."

"Do you think any one else has noticed it?"

"No, I don't think any one has, mayor."

"It is too late, now, to think of looking for other tracks, that is out of the question."

"Clean out, mayor. Ther hull camp has been trampin' over ther ground all day. Ther only thing ter do, sence ye believe that Duplex John wasn't Deadwood Dick, is ter proclaim his innocence and let him come back hyer and try ter unravel ther mystery."

The mayor's face bore a puzzled expression.

CHAPTER XIII.

DOCTOR AND PATIENT.

By night the great Egyptian healer was ready for business.

A flag bearing his name had been nailed to a stick over the door of the cabin he had rented, and his posters were seen here and there all over the camp.

When it was growing dark, Chinese lanterns were lighted and hung out, and the doctor's cabin was the most brilliant spot in the whole gulch. Then, a little later, some red fire was burned in front of the cabin.

This, of course, to draw a crowd.

When the idlers of the camp began to roam out in that direction, the doctor had his servant carry the table out of the cabin and place a chair upon it before the cabin door.

That having been done, and the doctor having taken his place on the chair, he directed Chop Wong to beat a tom-tom, which the Chinese proceeded to do with a vengeance, accompanying it with a series of yelps and yaups that were well calculated to draw attention.

The crowd began to enlarge rapidly, the doctor told a funny story that made all his hearers roar with laughter, and in less than ten minutes nearly the whole population of the camp was congregated in front of that cabin. Having his audience, the doctor launched out upon a great harangue, telling them of diseases known and unknown, and guaranteeing to cure them all on the "no cure no pay" plan.

When he had done, at the end of an hour or so, he invited all to remain who desired to see him for advice.

He had kept the crowd together by telling funny anecdotes every now and then as he went along.

Hot-head Smith was one of the crowd, and he walked away when the harangue ended.

Mayor Eastwood overtook him on his way to the Jolly Polly.

"I thought you were going to call on the doctor, Smith?" he reminded.

"Yas, so I was, but I don't have to, now," was the answer.

"How is that?"

"Why, I'm satisfied et is all right. Nobody could play a game like them two fellers is doin', ef they wasn't jest what they p'tend ter be."

"That is my own belief exactly, Hot-head. I have been watching them, after what you said, but they are just what they seem, nothing more nor less. Pretty good talker, but a mighty quack, you bet."

"And thar's lots ov fools hyer will take his stuff."

"Well, it won't kill, it is likely, and if it does no good there is nothing to pay."

"I noticed that Job Turner wur takin' et all in, and I don't doubt he'll stay behind fer his lame back. Mebby I would be a fool, too, ef anything ailed me. I dunno."

"A sick man will go any length for relief. Here is another thing, about what you suggested this afternoon."

"What wur that, mayor?"

"About making it known that Duplex John was probably not the murderer after all, and having him come back here, if he could be found—"

"Yes, yes, I remember I said that."

"Well, I was going to say—better let it rest as it is. Maybe the guilty one will trap himself by saying something, and it is not likely that any harm will come to Duplex John and his pard, after the start they got."

"Jest as you say, mayor."

That was what the mayor said, and so they continued in conversation as they wended their way back again to the Jolly Polly.

Meantime, the greater part of the crowd was going in the same direction, but there were many who remained behind to consult with the doctor, and among them was Turner.

The doctor told them to form in line, and his servant would admit them one at a time, and in the scramble to see who would be first, Turner, with his lame back, which had been giving him particular trouble all the afternoon, since his exertions that morning with the body

of his friend, found himself the last in the line.

One by one they were admitted, the doctor questioned them, gave them some medicine with directions how to take it and told them to report early in the afternoon on the following day.

At last came Job's turn, and he had been awaiting it with all the patience for which his name was synonymous, and as he entered the Chinese announced:

"Him lastee man; allee samee no more."

"Then you may close the door and sit down, Chop Wong," said the doctor. And then to his patient:

"Well, sir, and what is the matter with you?"

"Oh! my back," said Turner, supporting himself with his hands. "It is almost cutting me in two."

"Trouble with your back, eh? Give me a brief history of your case, and let me see how long it has been troubling you and how you have been handled, and maybe I can help you."

The man complied, with all the minuteness a chronic sufferer is wont to enter into, and concluded:

"It wasn't so bad lately, but to-day I 'tended to the layin' out of my friend, him that was murdered, as you have heard tell, and I must have hurt it in liftin' him about, for it has been killin' me ever since."

The doctor seemed to take renewed interest in this particular case.

"Yes, that must be it," he agreed.

"So the murdered man was a friend of yours, was he?"

"Yes, and a better man never lived than what Dave Hamilton was."

"And you have no idea who killed him—"

At that instant the Chinese gave a violent sneeze, and the doctor looked in his direction and received a signal.

"Does that hurt you, my friend?" the doctor asked, pressing his patient's back in a certain place. "It does, eh? And how is it there? Ah! we are coming at it."

Some minutes were spent in that way.

"About the murder," the doctor observed as he ceased for a few moments; "it was too bad the murderer got away."

"Yes, so it was; but, if you mean that it was too bad that young man got away, I say no. I do not believe that he did the deed any more than you did, doctor."

"I think I can do something for your back, yes, I think I can. But your case is a serious one, or it would be, if allowed to run on a little longer. Then you think they had hold of the wrong man, do you?"

"Yes, I am almost sure of it."

"What makes you think that?" fussing among his medicines and selecting different vials.

"Well, in the first place, he was on good terms with Hamilton. Next, he took no pains to hide his tracks. And then, which nobody else seems to see, he didn't go back to his cabin."

"What has that got to do with it?"

Job stated the same point that we have seen Hot-head Smith bring to Mayor Eastwood's notice.

"That is a good point, sir, a very good point—let me see, I mustn't give you too strong a dose to start with. Yes, that is a very good point, and it is good proof that the young man did not do the deed."

"That is what I hold, sir. Oh! my back!"

"We'll ease that back shortly, I think. By the way, this is the same cabin where he lodged, isn't it?"

"The very one, sir."

"What kind of fellow was he?"

"A fine fellow, every inch—anyhow, I thought so, and so did Dave." And the man entered upon a description.

"Have you mentioned this point to your mayor?"

"No, not yet, sir."

"Why not?"

"Well, ye see I have sort of taken it 'pon myself to hunt down the man that really did do it, and I thought mebby if I kept still about it something might come of it. But that don't seem likely, so I have mentioned it to you. What I have done, though, I have sent for one of the best detectives in the West."

"Indeed! And who might that be? There, I think this mixture will benefit you, sir."

"Why, it is Deadwood Dick, Junior. Did you ever hear of him?"

"Allee samee me hab," spoke up the Chinese.

CHAPTER XIV.

CONFIDENCE EXCHANGED.

Doctor and patient alike turned quickly and looked at the Chinaman.

The Chinese was grinning, his slanting eyes were twinkling, and he twirled his hands one over the other within the sleeves of his loose blouse.

"Yep," he assured, "me allee samee hab hear tell Deadeewood Dickee. Me use know him; me washee-wash him shirtee many time, you bettee. Me know him, every time, allee samee like tea."

"And you say you have sent for this man?" asked the doctor.

"Yes, sir," said Turner.

"Where you send?" asked the Chinaman.

"Down to Phoenix, where I heard he had been lately."

"Allee samee mebby findee him," said the Chinese. "Him good boy, you bettee. One time kickee Chop Wong, makee me holla' ki-yi!"

"Ha! that reminds me," suddenly interrupted the doctor. "What do you know about that foolish fellow here in the camp they call Ky-Ky, Mr. Turner? Has he always been foolish?"

"Yes, I reckon he has, sir," was the response, Turner supporting his back with his hands as he spoke. "He has been that way ever since I came to the camp, and that's as much as four years ago. The poor loon 'will never be any better, to my mind."

"I have heard it hinted that some think he is recovering his senses, if he ever lost them."

"Well, he does have spells, that's so, and they come oftener."

"How does he live?"

"He seems to hang on, somehow. Ther boys of the camp chuck him a crust or a bone now and again, 'bout the same as they would to a dog."

"It is too bad. I suggested to your mayor that maybe I might be able to do something for him, but the mayor forbade me having anything to do with him. He would not allow experimenting, he said."

"Is that so?"

"Just as I tell you."

"That is queer; I don't see what difference it could make to Eastwood, do you?"

"No, I do not, certainly, being a stranger here. Just as well to say nothing about it, Mr. Turner; I would not have your mayor think that I am meddling, you see."

"Certainly not; but it is funny he should interfere."

"Now, about this medicine, Mr. Turner. Take it as I have directed, and come to me again. What was it, Chop Wong?"

The Chinese, behind Mr. Turner and with his back toward him, had written something on a bit of paper, and he now interrupted the doctor in what he was saying by stepping forward and handing it to him.

"Did you drop this on floor?" the Chinese asked.

"Maybe I did," said the doctor, taking it and reading the few words it contained.

"As I was about to say, Mr. Turner," he continued, "come to me again about two o'clock in the morning—"

"Two o'clock!" the astonished Job exclaimed.

"Yes. Yours is a serious case, and I am giving you a powerful medicine. You are kept awake a good deal at nights anyhow, and it will be no trouble for you to step over. Come quietly and tap lightly at the door; I will be expecting you and will let you right in."

"Well, if you say so—"

"I do say so. You see, I never take hold of a case unless I think I can cure it, and my reputation is at stake. Go home now, take the dose as I have directed, and come again at the hour named. Do not tell any one, by the way, that you are coming, for I cannot be bothered with others with trifling ailments out of regular hours."

"Well, I'm grateful to you, doctor, I am sure, and—"

"There, there, don't mention it. It is pure business, Mr. Turner. I have got to cure you, you see, or I get no pay."

Some further remarks, and Mr. Turner took leave; and no sooner had the Chinese locked the door than he turned to the doctor with rather a changed expression.

"The very man we want," he said, in low tone.

"You think he is to be trusted?"

"Yes, I do."

"All right, then, we will trust him. I tell you, we are in the lion's den with a vengeance."

"Nevertheless, we are able to take care of ourselves, I think. With half a dozen trusty guns apiece upon our persons, I think we can give an interesting account of ourselves."

"Not a doubt of it. How am I playing the role?"

"Famously. You are my best bower."

"One thing I forgot to ask my patient."

"What was that?"

"Whether it was a secret that he has sent for Deadwood Dick, or known to others besides himself."

"Not important, and we can inquire into that when he comes again. Ten to one, our worthy mayor has had a hand in it somewhere. We are on the right track, Mr. Whitley."

"Not a doubt of it, Mr. Bristol."

They had spoken in tones so low that a listener outside, no matter how keen his ears, could not have overheard a word that was said.

For some time they carried on their conversation, a talk that would be of interest to our readers, but which our narrowing space compels us to omit, but at last their light was out and the cabin dark.

Sharp at two o'clock came a tap on the door.

The Chinese got up and opened the door silently, and Job Turner stepped in.

"Everything all light," whispered the Chinese. "Doctor all ready to see you. Him makee you well allee same like sound dolla', you bettee. Stand still, me gittee light."

The doctor's servant had closed the door while speaking, and now he struck a match and lighted the lamp.

The light revealed Turner standing braced against the side of the door.

He looked as if he didn't know whether it was all right or not, but the appearance of the doctor immediately reassured him.

"I see you are prompt, Mr. Turner," the doctor pleasantly greeted, but in very low voice. "How do you feel? How did the medicine appear to work on you? Do not speak louder than this."

Turner sat down in a chair that was offered him, and gave the particulars asked for, the doctor listening attentively till he had done.

"I am glad it has worked that way, Mr. Turner," he said. "You are as good as cured already."

"You don't say so!" ejaculated the patient.

"Yes, I do say so. I can cure you in one month, sound as a dollar, if you follow my directions."

"I'll do it, I'll do it. Words cannot begin to tell how grateful I am to you, doctor. I'll blow your horn wherever I go and bring you all the trade I can, I promise."

"I have not a doubt of that, my good man. You naturally would feel grateful to me, I suppose. How would you like to show me how grateful you are? It is one thing to say a thing, you know, while it is quite another to put it really into performance."

"What do you mean, doctor? I don't quite ketch on, as the boys say. You just try me, though, if you doubt me."

"I think you are to be trusted, Mr. Turner."

"Try me, try me."

"Have you heard anything further about the mystery of the murder of your friend?"

"No, not a thing. But, how could it be expected? It is too soon, for we have only just sent for Deadwood Dick, as I told you before. I cannot hope to meet with success till he gets here."

"You say 'we' have sent for Deadwood Dick. Whom do you mean besides yourself?"

"I mean Mayor Eastwood."

CHAPTER XV.

SPREADING THE NET.

Then there was a moment of silence.

The Chinese had turned the lamp down until they could no more than see one another distinctly.

Job Turner moved a little uneasily on his chair, and looked from one to the other of the strange pair in whose company he found himself. The doctor was the next to speak.

"Don't be alarmed, Mr. Turner," he said, "there is no occasion for it. We are using these precautions in order that no one may know what is going on here. I will take you into my confidence now, and tell you that I am here for the purpose of finding out who killed Dave Hamilton."

Job Turner gave a great start.

"Then you—you are—Deadwood Dick?" he whispered.

"No, sir, I am not Deadwood Dick," said the doctor, smiling.

"Then you are not Duplex John—But, no, I can see that you ain't him."

"No, I am not he, either. No matter who I am just now, Mr. Turner. Let us turn back to the main question."

"And what was that? Hang me, but you are gettin' me sort of discombobbled, with so many mysteries all at once. You will have to refresh my mind."

"Why, you were to do me a favor to prove your gratefulness, you know."

"Oh! so I was."

"Well, are you ready to do it?"

"Yes, if it is anything that's honest, and it is anything that I can do."

"It is both. You aid me in what I desire to accomplish, and I promise you that I will find for you the murderer of your friend."

"A bargain, by Joshua!"

"Not so loud. We must work with the utmost secrecy, or our plans may be upset."

"But, say," and Job sat up straight in his chair, regardless of his back, "have you been foolin' me about doctorin' my back? If you have—"

"No, my friend, no, no. I am a regular physician, I assure you of that, and I have prescribed the right thing for you. Have no concern in regard to that. I am no traveling quack."

"Well, I have to take your word for it. What is it you want me to do?"

"You trust me?"

"Yes."

"If you cannot do that, I do not want your help. If you can and do trust me, I will do all that I have pledged."

"All right, let me hear what et is."

"Can you tell me where the foolish fellow Ky-Ky is at this moment?"

"No, I can't, but I s'pose I could find him, if it was necessary he should be found. I know about all the places where he sleeps."

"Very good. I want to find him, I want to bring him here, and, in spite of your mayor to the contrary, try to restore the poor fellow to his right mind. Now, are you still grateful?"

"Thunder!" the man ejaculated, "I didn't think it was anything like that."

"Then you want to back out?"

"No; but Mayor Eastwood is a terror if you cross him, and I had rather have him for a friend than as a foe."

"You feel quite certain that he is your friend, I suppose?"

"Not a doubt of it. He fell right in with my plan of sending for Deadwood Dick to take hold of this case. He even wrote the letter for me and attended to sending it off."

The doctor and his Chinese servant exchanged glances at that.

"Well, I would not want you to offend your friend, of course. Has this man ever done you any particularly friendly service?"

"Well, no, I can't say that he ever has."

"The balance is the other way, perhaps."

"Maybe it is—yes, it must be."

"You thought more of Hamilton, perhaps."

"Yes, by a good deal," answered quickly.

"By the way, were Hamilton and your mayor on good terms?"

"Well, no, for a fact, they wasn't; but I don't know as they would have done harm to each other."

"What was their difference?"

"Well, Hamilton built that cabin of his own up there beyond Eastwood's line, and wouldn't pay rent, and then he made a find that promises to be almost as good a mine as the Good Luck."

"Rivalry, then?"

"Yes; and more'n that, Eastwood claimed that Hamilton had discovered only the same vein the Good Luck is working, and the more they talked about it the more they agreed to disagree about it, so to say. It was unpleasant, but I don't know as they were enemies."

"We have to take for granted that

they were not friends, anyhow. Has it never struck you that perhaps some friend of Eastwood's has taken a hand in the game and killed Hamilton to put the property all in Eastwood's hands?"

"The mischief! I never thought of that. If that is the case, it is certain that Pete Eastwood does not know of it, for he wouldn't countenance that."

"I am inclined to think that he does know it."

"No!"

"Look at this."

The doctor held out a crumpled letter for Turner to see.

"Thunder!" the man exclaimed. "It is the very letter that we wrote to Deadwood Dick this afternoon."

"Proof that your mayor did not mail it, as he promised to do. I hope I have satisfied you, Mr. Turner, that your mayor is not the man of honor that you appear to have thought him."

"I wouldn't have believed it. I will see him, and I will demand to know what he means—"

"Not on your life," interrupted the doctor.

"Why not?"

"Because I am here to deal with him and get at the bottom of the matter. All I need is your help, for we are only two against the whole camp."

"Except Gil Rogers—you can count on him to the last gasp, for he liked Dave Hamilton as well as I did."

"But he is not here."

"Ain't he?"

"Do you mean to hint that he is?"

"You have trusted me, and there is no reason why I shouldn't trust you. I know where Gil Rogers is."

"Then we are four against the town, and if we don't solve this mystery and bring the guilty wretch to justice it will be no fault of ours. But, are you willing to aid me in what I proposed?"

"What is to be gained by it?"

"That is another matter. If I am successful, it will be the gaining to the foolish man his reason. That ought to be enough."

"Well, I'll do it."

"Bully all light!" exclaimed Chop Wong. "You muchee goodee fella, allee samee me anothel!"

Job looked at the Celestial in a puzzled way, but could not make out the momentary suspicion that had come to him. Chop Wong appeared a Chinese beyond any question of doubt.

"Well, where do you think he will be found?" asked the doctor.

"In one of half a dozen places, sure."

"How is the pain in your back?"

"Pshaw! you have made me forget all about it. I believe it is almost gone for the time being."

"I believe it is gone for all time, unless you neglect your medicine. Let me make a little confession to you. Shall I?"

"More puzzles?"

"No, but I want to inspire all the confidence in you I can."

"Go ahead, then."

"It was not necessary for you to come here at this time of night; I only wanted to enlist your service. Knowing that Hamilton had been your friend, I knew we could trust you if we won you over."

"Yes, I seen that, after you showed your hand. You ain't made no mistake, sir."

"Well, will you go out, quietly, learn where Kyler Kyle is, and come back here and report? Then we will go and see to carrying him here without arousing any one in the camp in doing so."

CHAPTER XVI.

A STARTLING SCHEME.

In about half an hour Job Turner returned.

He knocked lightly upon the door of the cabin as before, and was as promptly admitted.

"I have found him," he announced.

"Where is he?" asked the doctor—let us still call him so.

"He is snorin' away under the end of the hind porch of the Jolly Polly, in one of his reg'lar bunks."

"Poor fellow! Do you think we can get him out without disturbing anybody in the building?"

"I don't know about it. If he wakes up and sets up his screechin', ye can't."

"I'll take care that he does not wake up, never fear about that."

"Well, in that case, I think it can be done."

"Lead the way, then, in the most shadowy course you can find, and we'll be about it without delay."

No more was said; Job was ready to do his part, and they filed out of the cabin as silently as three shadows, and away in the direction of the Jolly Polly.

The camp was wrapped in darkness, and the silence was profound.

Cautiously they proceeded, taking every care not to make a sound that any one could hear, even if awake, and finally they came to their destination without having been discovered.

There Job pointed out where the sleeping Ky-Ky lay.

By this time their eyes had become accustomed to the darkness, and it did not take the doctor long to locate Ky-Ky's head.

Taking a small sponge from his pocket, he saturated it with something which he poured out of a small bottle, and, having so done, he handed the sponge to his body servant.

Chop Wong took it, and crept like a cat under the porch.

He was under there for a minute, perhaps, and when he returned the sponge was not in his hand.

"Him all light," he said, in lowest whisper.

"You are sure?" asked the doctor.

"Yep, me muchee sure."

To prove it, the Chinese stooped and caught hold of the sleeping Ky-Ky by the heels and dragged him forth.

When the sleeper came out of the utter blackness into the lesser darkness, it was seen that the sponge had been secured to his nose and mouth by a handkerchief that was tied around.

"Ketchee on," the servant whispered.

The doctor did so, taking hold of the sleeper under his arms, and thus they bore him away in the direction of the cabin.

Like shadows they moved, and their venture proved an entire success so far as reaching the cabin without discovery was concerned.

They entered, laid the body on the floor, and while Chop Wong lighted the lamp again, Job Turner secured the door. The body was then taken up and laid out on a board across the table.

The next thing in order was to cover every known crack and crevice so that no light could be seen from without, should any one happen to be awake.

Presently that had been done quite satisfactorily.

"Now for the examination," whispered the doctor. "That is the first thing in order."

The Chinese servant took up the lamp and held it so that its light fell fav-

orably, and the doctor first of all removed the sponge from under the man's nose and felt his pulse.

"All right," he whispered. "Not the first time by many that I have done that trick."

Job Turner stood by, his eyes bulging with curiosity.

"Can you lend me a hand, sir?" the doctor asked of him. "I will do the lifting, so that it will not hurt your back."

"Certainly," said Job.

"Well, pull off the man's jacket, while I hold him up."

The doctor lifted the unconscious man by his shoulders, and first one sleeve and then the other was pulled off.

The jacket was old and ragged, and it had to be handled with extreme care in order not to tear it all to pieces in removing it, but it was not a circumstance compared to the shirt.

They had no need to remove that—they could look through it anywhere, it was so old and worn.

The doctor and his servant immediately gave all their attention to the left arm.

A touch of the finger tore the sleeve all away, and there, between the elbow and shoulder, in India ink, were a scroll and the letters "A W" in red.

"My brother!" cried the doctor.

"The sole survivor of the massacre!" exclaimed the Chinese.

Job Turner, more surprised than ever, could only look from one to the other.

The seeming Chinese had dropped his lingo English for the instant, thereby supporting a suspicion Job had almost formed once before, and yet his appearance gave it the lie.

"I see you are puzzled," said the doctor.

"I'm worse than that," declared Job. "I am completely knocked out of time for certain."

"You have heard of the Cottonwood Meadows massacre?" asked the seeming Chinese.

"I'd like to see a man in these parts that hasn't," the response.

"Well, here you see the sole and only survivor, as you heard me say. I happened on the spot only a little while after the tragedy had been enacted, and saved this man from the fire."

"Ha! then you are—"

"Sh! Do not mention it. Yes, I am he; but it must be kept secret to the end."

"You can trust me now. I'll go my last drop of blood in the game, for now I am beginning to get my eyes open, and I think I see the hand behind the mystery."

"And I hope that the mystery of that awful affair is now to be cleared up at last. But, allee samee, it all 'pend on you, doctol."

In spite of himself, Job had to laugh at the sudden transition.

"And it all depends, perhaps, upon whether or not I can bring my poor brother back to his right mind. Poor Andy! I never thought to find you in such a sad plight as this."

"We makee that vely muchee all light by'm by," said the Chinese.

"Yes, I hope we can."

The doctor felt of the man's head as well as he could through all the tangle of hair, and when he had done he shook his head, but his face wore a less anxious look.

"I feared that his skull had been injured, and that bone was pressing on the brain," he said.

"There was nothing the matter with his head when I left him there for dead at the time when that awful deed was done," said the seeming Chinese.

"I am glad it is so. I may be able to restore his mind by the hypnotic process. I made no false statement when I announced my success in that line in my talk to the people."

"What is to be done with him now?" asked Turner.

"I'll tell you, but it is to be a mystery to you as much as it will be to every one else when it is discovered."

"Certainly."

"We will cut off the matted hair and long beard, give him a clean shave and trim and comb his hair, and place him where we found him."

"Jee-roo-sa-lamm!" ejaculated the astonished Job.

"What is the matter?" asked the doctor.

"What a sensation thar will be in Paradise in the morning."

"Yes, I have no doubt there will be something like it, and your worthy mayor will probably think that I have had a hand in it, and that will set the ball to rolling."

"And say, while I think about it, wouldn't it be well for me to go to my cabin and tell Gil Rogers all about it—he is hiding there—and bring him here so he will be on hand if needed? He is clear grit, is Gil, and he kin hide here as well as there."

"Yes; do that, by all means."

CHAPTER XVII.

MAKING THE BIG HAUL.

Turner went quietly out, and the doctor and his servant undertook at once the work the doctor had suggested.

With a pair of scissors the man's tangled hair and beard were quickly cut off, and when the beard had been trimmed down close, a razor was applied and the work completed.

Ryan Whitley had nothing to say until it was finally all done, and the man had been washed and combed, when he gazed at him sadly, musing:

"Poor Andy! poor Andy! That you should have come to this! But, you shall be avenged! I swear it!"

"Yes, the score shall be settled with interest," said Deadwood Dick, grimly.

"But I must apply a restorative," said Ryan.

He took a vial and dropped some drops from it upon a spoon, and adding a little water, poured it between his brother's lips.

"There," he said, "he will be all right now. We shall have time to take him back where we found him, before he comes to, and he will probably sleep right on till morning, and wake up naturally."

Putting out the light, they opened the door and carried the poor fellow forth, and in due time he had been deposited where first discovered. His coat had been replaced upon him, of course, and when they left him they pulled something up around his head so that he would not take cold.

On returning to the cabin, they found Job Turner and Gil Rogers there awaiting them.

An earnest consultation followed.

Bright and early in the morning there arose a great shout in the camp.

Doughy Baker, one of the earliest risers in Paradise, added his voice to the clamor, and ran for the mayor's cabin.

There he pounded on the door with

even more vim than on the occasion of the murder of David Hamilton, calling upon the mayor to come out with all haste, and declaring that another murder had been done.

"Murder!" he cried. "Murder! Another murder in the camp, mayor!"

This would have been enough—more than enough—but in the direction of the Jolly Polly another wild series of cries were going on.

The denizens of the place, as they made their appearance, had their attention divided, some running in the direction of the mayor's cabin, and others hastening toward the Jolly Polly.

In front of the saloon stood Ky-Ky, yelling at the height of his voice, and madly clawing at his face to feel his beard. It was plain that he missed something, and it was evident that it puzzled him. That beard, as we have said before, had been the poor fellow's pride.

There he stood, shaven and shorn, his pale face wearing an expression impossible to describe. It seemed one of mingled horror and bewilderment.

"Look at Ky-Ky!" some one shouted.

"What has happened to him?" cried another.

"Ther lightnin' must 'a' struck him last night," a third.

And so ran the comments, while the crowd laughed heartily, but in a few moments, with a yell wilder than ever, Ky-Ky made a dash for the mayor's cabin.

There was another crowd, as said, and just as Ky-Ky came tearing up, the mayor opened the door to step out, having dressed in about as much haste as on the previous morning.

"What the deuce—"

So he started to demand, but at that instant he caught sight of Ky-Ky.

At the sight his mouth dropped open, his tongue cleaved, his face blanched, and his eyes seemed ready to start from their sockets.

The crowd looked from one to another, the fool of the camp uttering cries and indicating with his hands what had happened, and the mayor trying his best to recover his equilibrium.

"Who has done this thing?" the mayor managed to thunder, finally. "Who could play such a trick on the fool as this?"

"But the murder!" urged Doughy Baker. "I tell ye Hot-Head Smith has been murdered, Mayor Eastwood! He is a-layin' in his cabin dead, same as poor Mr. Hamilton was!"

"What's that yer say?" cried a man in the crowd, for the first time getting the import of what Doughy wanted to tell the mayor. "Not another murder in Paradise? Mayor, never mind this hyer fool, but let's 'tend to what's more 'portant."

"Great heavens! it can't be true!" the mayor exclaimed.

He turned away from Ky-Ky, but the camp fool caught hold of him and clung to him, uttering his dumb complain.

"Get away, fool!" the mayor cried, shaking the poor fellow off and giving him a blow and a kick. "There is something else to see here besides hearing you whine."

"Yes, you are right there is, sir!"

Out in front of the mayor stepped Dr. Huxley Pettibone, with a pistol at the mayor's head.

"Allee samee you bettee!" chimed in the Chinese servant, standing behind his master and presenting a brace of guns, one on either side. "Bettle thlow up hands dam quickee!"

"Bet your life ye better had!" cried

Gil Rogers, presenting another gun on one side simultaneously with Job Turner, who brought one to bear upon the other side. "We mean grim old business, Pete Eastwood, and you are ther doughnut we mean ter fry!"

"Wh—wh—what is the meaning—"

"It means that you are under arrest for the murder of David Hamilton, one thing," said Ryan Whitley, severely.

"It's a lie!" screamed the mayor.

"Allee samee tlee," chipped in Chop Wong.

"Boys, I call on you—"

"Let any man attempt to interfere here, and I will put a bullet through this man so quick he will never know what struck him," cried the doctor.

"Do ye mean ter say that he killed Dave Hamilton?" one man asked.

"Just what I do mean to say, and I call upon all honest men in this camp to hear what I have to offer."

"It is a lie! a lie!" screamed the mayor, as white as death, and with perspiration standing out on his face. "I say it is a black lie, and I defy any man to prove it!"

He struggled, but Gil Rogers and Job Turner held him fast, while the Chinese bound his hands.

"We will prove it fast enough to satisfy you," averred Whitley.

Ky-Ky had gathered himself up, and was walking away whimpering, but the doctor asked some one to detain him as a witness.

"A witness?" the crowd ejaculated.

"What kind of a witness kin a fool be?"

"I intend to show you," responded the doctor. "That man is my brother."

Eastwood uttered a cry, and stared at the doctor.

"Who are you, then?" he demanded, putting the inquiry that sprung to his lips.

"My name, sir, is Ryan Whitley, brother to Andrew Whitley, whom you tried to murder at the time of the Cottonwood Meadows massacre. Ah! that strikes you to the marrow, I find."

In fact, the mayor reeled, and seemed as if he would fall, but Rogers and Turner caught him.

"Ther Cottonwood Meadows massacre?" cried the crowd.

"Yes, the same."

"It is a lie—it is a lie!"

"Bring that poor brother of mine here," ordered Whitley. "I have already the proof of what I assert. I will satisfy you."

The "camp fool" had been caught, and was now led forward, passive enough, having lapsed again into his usual state of nothingness, so to speak.

Ryan Whitley seized him and tore away the sleeve from his left arm, exposing to sight the marks we have twice mentioned, and pointing to the letters there seen, he said:

"By this mark I know that this man is my brother, and by it, also, I know that he was the sole survivor of the Cottonwood Meadows massacre. This gentleman here," indicating his Chinese servant, "saved him from the burning at that time, and he will vouch for it!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

RETRIBUTION AND CONCLUSION.

The crowd was silent, overawed.

The "czar" of the camp a prisoner! It was enough to stagger them.

Paradise was utterly overcome, and her denizens looked from one to another wondering what was coming next.

Having exposed his brother's arm, Ryan Whitley removed the goggles he had been wearing, replaced his false

front teeth, and, behold! he was the man whom John Dixon had gone down to the stage to meet on the preceding morning! "Phil Parson!" cried the crowd.

"Otherwise Ryan Whitley," assumed the doctor. "Do we look like brothers?" There was no mistaking the relationship. There was a striking resemblance that was not to be doubted.

As for Mayor Eastwood, he could only stare, seeming to have lost the power of speech. He was deathly white, and was trembling from head to foot. Guilt was stamped on every feature.

"Yes, I will vouch for that," said the Chinese servant, dropping his make-believe and speaking English the plainest.

"Who be you?" some one demanded.

The seeming Chinese removed his hat, took off a spring that had been applied just over his temples to make his eyes appear oblique, and allowed his face to assume its natural pose.

"You will hardly recognize me, even yet, I suppose," he said, "without my mustache and my hair—for I had my head shaved in order that there might be no discovery of the cheat, but I am Duplex John, whom you came near sending to death for a crime I never did."

There was a shout at that.

"More than that," added Ryan Whitley, "he is the famous Western detective known as Deadwood Dick, Junior."

"At your service," said Dick, bowing, "though my own mother would hardly recognize me as I am at this moment. Yes, I am Deadwood Dick, and this man is my best bower!"

He indicated Ryan Whitley.

At mention of the name of Deadwood Dick, Peter Eastwood's head had fallen and he uttered a moan.

For a little time the crowd carried on like wild people, but presently something like order was again restored, and when Ryan Whitley could make himself heard, he said:

"Gentlemen, I am about to try an experiment. Will you kindly bring out the tables and chairs, the same as you had them here yesterday morning? If so, I will mount the tables so that all may have a chance to hear and see what is done. It is my desire to prove the charge I have made."

It needed no further urging.

Willing hands speedily carried out the request, and the temporary platform was again in place.

Mounting this, Ryan Whitley directed that the prisoner be brought up, and also the demented survivor of the mysterious massacre, which directions were obeyed.

These were seated, and Ryan addressed the crowd. He had told them nothing false, on the previous night, concerning his knowledge of medicine and science. For five years, nearly, he had been devoting himself closely to both. He felt that he knew something in those branches.

He felt assured that he could, by the power of hypnotism, restore his brother to his right mind. If he could, it was altogether likely that the man's reason would commence at the point where it had been lost to him, and that he would take up his life again from that point.

Let us not dwell upon the details.

With the silly man seated in a chair before him, the doctor bent himself to the task, the crowd looking on in silence.

Even the prisoner—the man accused of that terrible crime—could but look on interested, albeit he was like death itself in appearance. There was something terrible in its mystery.

Of a sudden the demented man gave a

great start, pressed his hand over his eyes, and said rapidly:

"Yes, yes; your word is enough, Deadwood Dick. I know you will do what you promise. Listen: My name is Andrew Whitley. I discovered a rich gold deposit over in Horsetail Gulch. I took a man into my confidence whom I supposed to be my friend. We made up this outfit and set out to take possession of my find. But, he was far from being my friend. An hour or so ago he and a pard of his attacked the rest of us, they having rendered our weapons useless, and shot us down like dogs. Not only that, but they blew up the train. They piled it as you see it, fired it, and then, with their boots over their arms, set off in that direction, leaving no trail."

He removed his hand from his eyes to indicate the direction he meant, and for the first time realized his surroundings. He looked, stared, his face changed expression twenty times in as many seconds.

"He has spoken the truth," spoke up Deadwood Dick. "He has taken up the thread of conversation where he dropped it five years ago when talking with me."

At that moment Andrew Whitley's eyes rested upon Peter Eastwood.

With a cry he sprang at his throat.

"Villain, traitor, murderer!" he sibilated in his fearful passion.

Others tried to interfere, but before they could do so the restored man had buried a knife in the villain's breast!

"Where is the other?" he cried. "Where is the fellow called Hot-head Smith? Let me find him, and I will serve him the same. He is the one who helped this man to kill my friends!"

"Andrew! Andrew! Don't you know me?"

Ryan caught his brother and drew him aside, while the others lent aid to the man he had stabbed.

"It is all up, all up!" gasped Eastwood, as they tried to lift him. "He has given me what I merited, for it was as he has said. The hand of Providence is in it; it is what I have felt would come sooner or later."

He told the story, little by little, while his life ebbed away. How he and Smith had planned the massacre for the sake of securing the rich find to themselves. How he had robbed Smith of any share in it, and had terrified him into silence. How he had been amazed, later on, to see Andy Whitley in the camp, but on finding that he was insane he had allowed him to remain. He had named him, and encouraged him in wearing a beard, had led him to take pride in it, and for that reason, no doubt, the man had been so quick to run to him to make known his loss. He admitted the killing of Hamilton, too, and of Smith.

He had heard the conversation among Deadwood Dick, Colonel Nickerson, and Mr. Williamson, in the hotel at Phoenix—he was the man who had gone out shortly after, as described. He had then and there resolved to kill Deadwood Dick if he ever came to Paradise. When Dick came there, as Duplex John, he knew him, and began scheming to kill him or have him killed.

He heard Hamilton ask Dick to step up and get his watch, on that morning when Dick was going down to the road to meet the stage, and, like a flash, the scheme came to him. After Dick had left the cabin, he slipped in and murdered Hamilton, whom he hated anyhow, feeling that he could easily put the crime upon "Duplex John," and so kill two birds with one stone. He had then

found it necessary to kill Smith for his own safety.

He had barely told this much, when he died, and the rest was easily guessed or supplied.

The people of Paradise could hardly believe that they were awake and not dreaming. The Whitley brothers had been in close and earnest conversation in the mean time, and by degrees Ryan had made known to Andy the lapse of time and all that had taken place. It was to Andy as if he had been asleep all that time, for he had not the slightest recollection of the role he had been playing all those five years.

It was a glad awakening, to find his brother there, but it was hard to convince him that it was really true—that which was told him. Gradually, however, he recognized the gulch, the location of the mine, and other features; but it was not until a visit had been paid to the scene of the massacre, later on, that the full realization of the lapse of time struck home to him. There all was changed, and little remained to tell the story.

Colonel Nickerson, who was a man of great influence, and Mr. Williamson, came up from Phoenix to hear and see for themselves, and it was no trouble for Andy Whitley to prove his claim, with such a witness as Deadwood Dick and the confession the dying villain had made, and he was put into possession of Paradise. There it was, intact, the greed for gain of the usurper having, as we have said, led him to hold fast to every foot of it.

Ryan remained long enough to see his brother well established, and to complete the medical work he had undertaken—especially in the case of Job Turner; then he took leave for home, where his immense practice was suffering during his absence. He and Deadwood Dick departed together, on the same day, and the camp could not do enough in their honor.

All her citizens put on holiday attire, and there was a gala day in their behalf. Job Turner and Gil Rogers were head and foremost at everything, and declared that the camp could not do half enough for Deadwood Dick and his worthy pard. There was one thing to which Deadwood Dick took exception, and that was, to having his name mentioned first in connection with the case.

"I have played second fiddle this time, my friends," he declared. "Ryan Whitley was best bower; give the credit to him. Through him my oath has been fulfilled."

THE END.

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